THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LIFE REVIEW AT A LONG TERM CARE FACILITY IN TIMES OF GRIEF AND LOSS

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Michael A. Havey

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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LIFE REVIEW AT A CONTINUING CARE FACILITY IN TIMES OF GRIEF AND LOSS

by

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This project was designed to meet the needs of residents with issues of grief and loss at Mount Pleasant Retirement Village, Monroe, Ohio. The practice of doing life review has been used effectively for years among residents from an activity or social service perspective. This project addressed more directly its usefulness as a tool for related spiritual issues. Each participant met for several individual sessions. Results of the model were evaluated by qualitative analysis instruments, and show that the participants were better able to express the grief and loss concerns using the resources of their faith as support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is impossible to thank everyone who helped me along the way of this DMin project, but here goes. First of all I say thank you to the students in the peer seminar, and our mentor, Ty Inbody. Without their encouragement to struggle with the really tough issues I could not have written the chapters on my theological perspective.

My thanks, also, to those I work with at Mount Pleasant Retirement Village. I'm sure that the emotional drain upon me as I pursued this course of study had to reflect in my performance of my work as a chaplain. Yet nothing was ever said about this. Many of them were very encouraging all along the way.

My thanks to those residents who participated in this project. Without these people being willing to share their stories this project would not have been possible. I only hope they know how valuable this sharing was, not only for themselves, but for myself and ministry in general to older adults.

Finally, and most importantly, I thank Deb, Chrissy, and Gregg. I am sure that they felt my absence from them, in body and in spirit. I thank them, too, for allowing me to share their stories with you. This was a crucial part of my spiritual struggle. You are the loves of my life.

PREFACE

This project stems from several sources, but primarily is motivated by pastoral concerns. These concerns began while I was a parish pastor. I was usually called in for crisis situations, e.g., illness, family troubles, or death. After a time the crisis passed, but the needs did not. In the crisis I offered presence, a listening ear, and a sounding board for those who must make quick decisions. I offered prayer, Scripture, and the presence of the Church. But I did not always know what to offer later on.

Most of the crises I became involved in had to do with issues of grief and loss. This was true not only in the case of death, but in many other cases. The issues of grief and loss became even more acute as I became a chaplain to a retirement village. The issues, again, were not only of death and dying, but of loss of role, loss of health, loss of home and roots. But still I was not sure what to offer for the long term. I am not a long-term counselor nor do I pretend to be. I have neither the training nor the time to be such a counselor to 375 residents plus over 200 staff, not to mention family of residents and staff.

Several years ago, I attended a workshop built around the subject of life-review. The presenter spoke of how life-review had been used by him in several groups at a nursing home. People began to deal with issues of their past, and to put their lives into perspective. He said that it was reminiscing

with a purpose. I had often thought of trying to get such a group together where I am now, but it just never happened. But I always wondered if it could be of some help, not only in dealing with one's life in general, but also in these times of dealing with grief and loss.

Another source from which this project stems is the grief issues I have faced in my own life over the past five years. There have been several sudden deaths in the family, including my wife's uncle, father, and grandfather. There was death of my father to cancer after about a four month illness. My mother-in-law lost her leg in a motorcycle accident, my wife was diagnosed with an incurable liver disease, both of my children were hospitalized within three months of each other, including my son being diagnosed with insulin dependent diabetes. During this time, also, my wife was attending college and graduated, and I switched from parish ministry to Chaplaincy. While some of these are happy events, they also carry with them their own sense of loss and grief.

It has been a time of intense soul-searching for me and my family. While we have not gone through any formal life-review, we have certainly done some reviewing of our own lives. Questions surely arise as to God's presence in all of this. And there are plenty of questions, all beginning with the word why. Why does God allow so much to happen to one family in such a short time? Why doesn't God stop all of this, if God is able to do so? Why does a good God allow/permit/cause such things? Why doesn't God explain what is going on, if there is any explanation? These questions are very much related to the subject of theodicy, which brings us to the next source from which this project stems.

The focus of my peer group for this program was theodicy. As the above family sketch shows, this was not merely an academic exercise. It

was, in fact, a very real part of my life. The questions of God's goodness and power, along with the presence of evil, were pondered by me everyday. In fact, I still ponder them. I believe they are questions that the population in general ponders every time the subject of God arises. It may be one of the reasons that Christians have a difficult time relating to many people today, as we do not often adequately address these questions.

As Christians we are often taught not even to ask the questions. For many, we are simply taught that God is all good, God is all powerful and that there is evil, caused by the devil. These are givens and not to be questioned. To question whether or not God is good, or whether or not God has some good purpose behind what we see, is to show a lack of faith. We have been taught to never question the power of God, otherwise our faith is seen to be in vain if God cannot do whatever God wants to do. Evil is usually acknowledged, with the devil being the source, not God. Yet the talk about evil is often such that the ultimate reality of evil is either denied or destroyed.

But I can no longer hold all three things together in my own mind. I have been searching for a way to put it all together. Much of the work of this project has been an attempt to do this for me personally. In a very real sense it has been a life review. I have had to face tough questions about God and my own beliefs about God. The answers that I have often been given, while very well intended, no longer give me any comfort. I have sought answers from a number of sources, some of which do speak to my struggle, others of which do not. While much of how I hold my faith together comes from a theistic position, I have had to modify many things. This paper includes much of what I have struggled with in this process.

Overall, this paper is about five case studies, four of which are residents who have gone through the process of life review. The fifth is my

own life review. It will contain much of the study we engaged in with the subject of theodicy, yet I approach it in a very personal rather than merely academic way. It contains also a brief theological statement which chronicles my attempt to continue to believe in the God revealed in Jesus Christ while at the same time taking very seriously my own personal pain.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first is an introduction to the subject of life review as well as an overview of the context where I serve as chaplain. It also includes a number of stories of the residents as their stories relate to the subjects of life review and theodicy. The second section provides a foundation for the project, both in a theological and practical sense, not that they are mutually exclusive. It includes much of the work done in our peer seminar, which is a review of current literature on the subject of theodicy, a theological statement, as well as my personal spiritual autobiography. I view this section as my own life review and the first case study. The third section is an overview of the project itself, both the nuts and bolts as well as the learnings. It also speaks to the replicability of the project and the future use of the learnings from this project in my context.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the concept of Life Review. Life Review as a therapeutic tool has been around for several decades, but recently has become more of a "hot topic." There are books available on doing life review, especially in group settings. It is often seen primarily as an activity or social service tool. The thrust of this project will be to use it as a spiritual tool to help with issues of grief and loss.

Chapter 2 is an overview of the context in which I serve, Mount Pleasant Retirement Village. It will include a brief history, a current look at the population, and several stories showing the connection between theodicy and aging.

Chapter 3 begins the second section and will be an examination of some of the current literature in the area of theodicy, in particular those we have used in our course of study. Many of the grief and loss issues among the older adult population, at least as I encounter them, are spiritual issues very much related to theodicy. It is not uncommon to hear questions about God's goodness or God's power. They may not be voiced as bluntly as that but the message is clear.

Chapter 4 is a very brief theological construct on my part to answer my personal concerns in theodicy. It provides a basis from which I build my ministry and the purpose for doing this project.

Chapter 5 is my own spiritual autobiography. By this I mean that it embodies my own personal struggles with finding faith, keeping faith, and continuing faith in the God revealed through Jesus Christ. It is at the same time personal, painful, and healing.

Chapter 6 begins the third part of this paper and will include some of the basics of the project. I will outline the process used, along with the use of context associates and project consultants.

Chapter 7 begins the case studies and is an introduction to the four participants in the project. I will share what I know of them before the project begins, so that as the project progresses we can track together the insights that life review brought about. Following this is a synopsis of the life reviews, looking at the life review from the perspective of the issues of grief and loss that are raised.

Chapter 8 will look at the response of the participants. It will compare the initial survey with the follow-up survey, individual comments from the participants, and my own subjective observations of the participants.

Chapter 9 begins the fourth part of the paper, dealing with replication of the project. Selection of the participants, setting up a program, and tips for the interviewer will all be addressed. It will include what I learned from both a mechanics point of view as well as a pastoral point of view.

Chapter 10 is a reflection upon how I see the use of life review impacting my ministry at Mount Pleasant Retirement Village.

To

My Father, Charles Havey

PART I

FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 1

LIFE REVIEW

The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun? One generation goes, and a generation comes: but the earth remains forever. . . . The end of the matter: all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments: for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-4; 12:13-14

Life review (sometimes called reminiscence or spiritual autobiography) is a process we go through all of the time. We are constantly re-evaluating the events and circumstances of our lives, along with our reactions and responses to them. This is usually a very informal undertaking. Life review, as it is understood here, is a formal way of doing what we all do naturally.

There are times, however, when we are more attuned to reflection upon past events and their meanings. Adolescence, mid-life, and retirement are examples of such times. We sort through the past to find some meaning that can be relevant for the present as well as giving hope for the future. We

perhaps do this in a most profound way in times of crisis. After the death of someone close we may re-examine our priorities in life. Following a serious illness we recommit ourselves to taking care of our bodies. When faced with unanswerable questions we seek for some spiritual answers to find meaning and sense in life.

In this chapter I will outline some of the background of life review and how it is used in pastoral care today, its place in the Scriptures, its usefulness in working with older adults, and its purpose in this project.

A Brief Introduction to Life Review

Life review as a therapy technique goes back a number of decades. In fact, as early as the 1930's, Charlotte Buhler in Vienna claimed that reviewing one's life is an inevitable part of the aging process.[1] Robert Butler, in the early 1960's, first brought this process to the forefront as a task for social workers and clinicians to use with older adults. Butler pointed out that the "tendency of older persons toward self-reflection and reminiscence"[2] is not a meaningless rambling by older folks who are caught up in the past or who are experiencing memory loss. It is an attempt to review past experiences and particularly unresolved conflicts, in an attempt to give significance and meaning to one's life. This "reintegration through life review has been likened

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[1]I am indebted to the work of several authors for this overview of life review, including Richard Morgan, "Guiding Spiritual Autobiography Groups for Third and Fourth Agers," *Journal of Religious Gerontology* 9, no. 2 (1995), 3, who provides this information, along with Robert Butler, and Robert Richter, cited below.

[2]Robert N. Butler, Myrna Lewis, and Trey Sunderland, *Aging and Mental Health: Positive Psychosocial and Biomedical Approaches,* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 111.

to Erikson's eighth stage of integrity, the realization that one must come to accept one's life as something that had to be, a unique story."[3]

Since the time life review was spoken of by Robert Butler, it has been used effectively in retirement settings as an activity, by both social workers and activity personnel. For example, Carmel Sheridan, a psychologist who uses reminiscence as a therapy tool among older adults in nursing homes and hospitals, writes about the use of life review as an activity.

> In later life reminiscence takes on a more significent [*sic*] role: it's how older adults get in touch with things and times that were important to them. Through reminiscing they find meaning in their memories: this helps to maintain their sense of identity, builds self-esteem and helps raise the overall quality of their lives.[4]

It is only in more recent years that life review has been made popular among chaplains and other clergy who work closely with the elderly. Until recently "the faith dimension is often bypassed in the life review process, with little attention being given to where God fits into the life journey."[5] In the work of Robert Butler life review was seen primarily as a tool for use in mental health work. There are many who believe its effectiveness and usefulness go far beyond this. This is chronicled by many pastors and chaplains who are using life review today and whose work is published in the professional journals.

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[3]Morgan, "Spiritual Autobiography," 3.

[4]Carmel Sheridan, *Reminiscence: Uncovering a Lifetime of Memories* (San Francisco: Elder Press, 1991), 9.

[5]Morgan, "Spiritual Autobiography," 3.

Life Review in Current Publications

Arthur Becker speaks of our life as standing on the bow of an ocean liner in the middle of the ocean. You cannot discover the course of the ship looking ahead. You must look at the wake left behind to see the course you have traveled. "A life review is looking at the wake of our life—and seeing the direction of God's guiding, caring nurture as He was at the helm of the ship of our life."[6] He points out that in his estimation, even if the life was bitter, there is still evidence of God's presence; through the "turning points, through little decisions," and "apparent coincidences"[7] we are led by God.

Robert Richter, a Veteran's Administration Hospital Chaplain, also speaks of the importance of life review from a spiritual standing, citing the work of two others in this field. He points out that James Fowler has developed the idea of stages of faith that parallel Erikson's stages of psycho-social development. Fowler's contention is that we cannot face a new agenda of life phase or crisis with a type of faith structure belonging to a previous stage. In the end, our past needs to be remembered and reworked. At this point we re-examine "what we stake our lives upon, what shapes our perception of life and gives it value, and our master story, the autobiography we are living out derived from core convictions and fundamental principles reflecting the ultimate meaning of our lives."[8] Richter also says that "the

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[6]Arthur Becker, *Ministry with Older Persons: A Guide for Clergy and Congregations* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 29.

[7]Ibid., 30.

[8]Robert Richter, "Attaining Ego Identity Through Life Review," *Journal of Religion and Aging* 2 (1986), 7.

elderly are not necessarily models of wisdom and serenity. Often their past needs a healing revisitation, revaluing and recomposing."[9]

Richter also points out, using the work of Donald Capps, that many events, as they are reviewed in our life are pivotal for understanding and putting together our own life story. These events he calls parabolic. He tells the story of a man who had been involved in a fatal accident. He reported that he had "failed to keep the equipment up," meaning that it was his fault for not properly maintaining his automobile. This was in fact the case. He further used this "failure to keep the equipment" up as a metaphor for his whole life. He had many health and relationship problems, caused by and soothed with alcohol. By coming to grips with this through life review, especially by reviewing this very horrible accident he came

> to gain a clearer picture of what he had become as he looked through the prism of the parabolic. His sense of shame caused deep reflection which helped him to face up to foolish, hurtful behavior resulting in regret, dismay, sorrow, and self-disgust.
>
> Through this experience came religious conversion. God's economy of grace extended far beyond this man's shame and self-pitying despair. The integrity of God's grace bestowed on him an alien dignity, despite the harm he had caused.
>
> The expressions of such grace are phrased in the great Biblical metaphors of altar, law court, slave market, and battlefield, those events which were parabolic in the life of Christ as they referred to atonement, acquittal, redemption, and victory.[10]

Donald Heinz speaks of our stages in life as careers, but that we often ignore what should be a person's last career. "This is the time for the

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[9]Ibid., 6.

[10]Ibid., 9.

successful negotiation of a final identity that gives retrospective meaning to life and prospective meaning to death."[11] He calls life review the "first task"[12] of this last career. He sees life review as a gift that not only addresses the needs of the one doing the life review but also as a gift to pass on to others.

> I want to argue that as life review progresses and the examination of life and death and their meanings goes deeper and stretches farther, unexpected reaches come to the soul which have profound implications for spiritual life and which promise an outpouring of welcome gifts to the next generation.[13]

Heinz mention three effects of doing this life review: repentance, mythologizing, and sacralizing. Repentance is to have "our public persona" unmasked and our "hidden selves disclosed" so that we may move beyond the barriers we have set in our lives. Mythologizing "frees us from the limits we impose and lets us call out the sacred power of death and unite it with our living."[14] Sacralizing is to look beyond this life and anticipate a fulfillment of this course.

What is called life review here goes by other names, but in each case it is a recounting of one's life events in order to find meaning and purpose in what has been done, as well as to set direction for what yet needs to be done. Anne Streaty Wimberly, in speaking of African American Christian Education, uses this idea in what she calls story-linking.

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[11]Donald Heinz, "Finishing the Story: Aging, Spirituality, and the Work of Culture," *Journal of Religious Gerontology* 9, no. 1 (1994): 5.

[12]Ibid., 11.

[13]Ibid., 12.

[14]Ibid., 15.

> Throughout every generation, stories reveal the very lives persons live and the lives for which they hope. Stories reveal persons' yearning for God's liberating presence and activity in their lives. And they reveal persons' yearning for meaning and purpose in life. Stories also reveal God's concrete presence and action in persons' lives and persons' responses to God.[15]

This very brief synopsis is intended to show that life review as a tool in addressing aging issues is a growing field of study and has been shown to be useful in many ways. I will approach the subject from the standpoint of its effectiveness in dealing with grief issues in later life.

Life Review in the Scriptures

There are many examples of life review in the Scriptures. Of course, it is not named as such, but the idea and purpose is the same. This chapter opened with a quote from Ecclesiastes. The quote includes the opening and closing verses of the book. It is obvious that this is a person's life review. It begins with a question, "What do people gain with all the toil with which they toil under the sun?" Is this not just another way of asking, "What is life all about? What is it's purpose? Was there any point to all I did? What is life's meaning?" All of the apparent ramblings of the ensuing chapters try to put some meaning to these questions. The writer reflects that there is "nothing new under the sun" (1:9) and "for everything there is a season" (3:1) and upon seeing the oppression that is practiced "I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive" (4:2) and "in my vain life I have seen everything; there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness and there are wicked people who prolong their life in

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[15]Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 38.

evil-doing" (7:15). He concludes that the only thing that really matters in life is fearing God and keeping the commandments. All the rest is vanity.

There are others who engage in life review. Before Moses was about to die, as the Lord had told him, he did some review of his own. He begins with an acknowledgment that the end is near, "I am now one hundred twenty years old. I am no longer able to get about, and the Lord has told me, 'You shall not cross over the Jordan'" (Deuteronomy 31:2). As he reviews his life he gives it closure by desiring to pass on to all the people both his wisdom and his blessing. Moses calls for Joshua and tells him that he must carry on. He writes down a new law to be given to the priests. He then recites the words of a song which chronicle the deeds of the Lord for the people through the wilderness up to this point as they are to enter the promised land. They are a way for Moses to say that his life had purpose. Then Moses blesses the tribes of Israel, and then can die in peace.

Elijah stops to review his life, only at first to find reason for despair and wish that it would end. After the contest on Mount Carmel, when Elijah thought he was alone and abandoned, he went off to be by himself and prayed, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors" (1Kings 19:4). But after hearing the voice that called him to return, he did so, and saw that there was still more to do. Through this life review he had found a purpose for his life.

Many times Paul gives us glimpses into his own life review. Paul says, "But whatever gain I had I count as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). Upon a recitation of the hardships Paul had endured, which included imprisonments, beatings, thirty-nine lashes, beatings with rods, a stoning,

shipwrecks, danger from many places, hunger and thirst, and exposure, Paul concludes, "If I must boast, I will boast of those things which show my weakness" (2 Corinthians 11:30). Later Paul writes to Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). All of these show that Paul often reflected upon the life of faith he lived in Christ, along with the sufferings, to put them all into perspective and to try and make sense out of all that has happened to him. Paul engaged in life review.

There are countless other examples of life review in the Scriptures, including Jacob (Genesis 49:1-33), Joshua (Joshua 24:14-29), David (2 Samuel 23:1-7), Job (Job 3:2ff.), many of the Psalms, and Jeremiah (Lamentations 3:1-66).

Life Review among Older Adults

As a chaplain, I often find myself talking with people who are either in the midst of life review and need some help sorting things out or have already done the life review and share their findings with me. I will share the stories of just a few of these people.

Alice

Alice had been through a number of tragedies in her life, but the ones weighing heaviest upon her now were the very sudden death of her husband, the hasty move to live in a retirement village, the decline of her own health, particularly her heart, and then an unforeseen event. While riding one day with her daughter and son-in-law, they were in a very bad accident. Alice was in intensive care for weeks. She needed surgery in order to have a chance to survive, and the chances with surgery were not that great. The

family said the decision would be up to Alice, one which she later had no recollection of having made. She said that she would have the surgery, she had nothing to lose. I even asked her point blank if she was sure that this is what she wanted to do. She told me yes.

Her recovery was long and arduous. She had to learn to walk all over again. It was not easy. Over a year after the surgery she could finally walk on her own. Shortly after this she suffered a stroke. She made it through the stroke, but she could not walk again. But she was determined. After almost another year she was back where she had been before the stroke, when she had another one. After her recovery from the stroke this time she did not have the determination to go through therapy again. She spoke of being "tired" and "weary" with no reason to try again. She seemed to give up, and it wasn't long until she was lying in a bed with little hope, not only of ever walking again but of living at all.

A few days before she died I was talking to her, when almost out of the blue she said, "I'm not sure I believe that God is good. Otherwise, why would he let me get better so many times so that this could happen to me again?" Alice had been doing her own life review. She was questioning a very basic belief of her Baptist background, the uncompromising goodness of God. She was also wrestling with an idea she had been taught, that everything happens "for a reason" and that the reason is "always good." She must have come to some resolution of her questioning, for the next day she told one of the staff here that everything was all right and that she was ready for God to take her. She fell into a coma and died a few days later.

Jackson

Jack was an elder in his church. For years, as an elder, he would visit a number of the nursing homes in his area, conducting worship, leading Bible study, and visiting with the residents. When he and his wife decided it was time to "give up" the farm (though he would often travel out through the country to go by the home place again) they moved to Mount Pleasant. Jack was really excited about the possibilities for continuing to do some of the ministry he had done before. He came by my office shortly after they moved in to show me some examples of the services and sermons he used. He was excited about my openness to his being involved. He told me that after they "settled in" he would contact me to get started.

But he never contacted me as such. He had attributed the reasons for needing to leave the farm as just the consequences of old age. He was actually in the early stages of Alzheimer's Disease. He was not here long until his steady decline became more and more apparent. He was not just aging; the effects of the disease were coming into full bloom. Even his wife, who typically tried to deny the obvious, could not any longer. Jack had to move into the nursing center.

One of the most insidious manifestations of Alzheimer's Disease is that it often leaves the victim with enough memory to know how bad things really are. It was this way for Jack. Through all of his confusion, he was aware of how forgetful and confused he became. His favorite way of speaking about God was to talk of God's "magnificence." He often talked with me about his "dreams" in coming here and of his desire to "share the Word." Yet he knew this could never be. I offered other ways of allowing him to help me, but often when the time came he had forgotten or for some other reason was unable to do so.

In one of the last conversations I had with Jack, in one of his more lucid moments, he shared with me his frustration over his disease and especially what it was doing to his family. Many times he broke down in tears. It was difficult, but we tried to look back over all the things that he had been able to accomplish. He finally commented, "God is truly magnificent." If only for a moment, a brief life review helped him gain a little peace in his troubled life.

Elsie

Elsie was a wonderful lady. We all liked to visit with Elsie. Even though she put forward a rough exterior, inside was a heart of gold. She could be demanding of others, but then again, she was a school teacher who demanded much of her students. She expected the best from them, and so she did the same from the staff here. She was also quite an accomplished musician, playing the church organ for many years, though now she was physically unable to do so. Though she was failing physically, her mental capacity did not seem to diminish even past her 90th year.

Elsie's own life review was a very positive one that became a real source of joy for her. She was proud of her family and all that had been accomplished by them through the years. She kept in touch with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, knowing each by name and the latest news on each. Seeing her family as it had grown and prospered and telling the story to others was her way of saying that her life had had meaning and purpose and that despite her physical ailments she was at peace in her heart. This kind of life review was also an inspiration to her to try and do what she could for others.

Elsie took it upon herself to guide and motivate a number of the employees here to go back to school and continue the education they may have once abandoned. She listened to the home problems of many, simply being a listening ear, offering advice when appropriate. Her life review allowed her to see that even with her deteriorating health she had much to give to others. And that she did. Life review not only helps one to deal with the pains but also to celebrate the pleasures.

Grief and Loss

Many, if not most, of the issues facing the older adults I work with are in the area of grief and loss. While this project does not directly address specific grief and loss issues, but rather whether or not life review is effective in helping older adults come to grips with their personal issues of grief and loss, it seems a few words about the subject of grief are appropriate here. The hope is not to learn something new about grief and loss as such, but a way of helping both the resident and Pastor to become aware of and attuned to the grief and loss issues that must be addressed.

Mitchell and Anderson define grief as

> *the normal but bewildering cluster of ordinary human emotions arising in response to a significant loss, intensified and complicated by the relationship to the person or the object lost.* Guilt, shame, loneliness, anxiety, terror, bewilderment, emptiness, profound sadness, despair, helplessness: all are a part of grief and all are common to being human. Grief is the clustering of some or all of these emotions in response to loss.[16]

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[16]Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Griefs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 54-55.

These emotions are a part of the everyday living of many of the older adults I serve. The expressions of this grief often come in the form of anger, which is directed at everyone and everything; blame, which can be placed upon one's self, others or God; or denial of the very event causing the grief. This grief can cause serious doubts about one's faith in a loving and caring God.

Granger Westberg speaks of the relationship between grief and faith.

> Faith plays a major role in grief of any kind. But not in the way some people think. They often seem to have the idea that a person with strong faith does not grieve and is above this sort of thing. . . .
>
> But religious faith—at least the Jewish Christian faith—has never said that a truly religious person does not grieve. What it has said is that there are good ways and bad ways to grieve, and what the person considers to be of most importance in life will definitely affect the way he or she grieves.[17]

This is often played out in the lives of the residents, who either think that they must simply accept the grief that they are experiencing or ignore it, whether motivated by issues of the present or past, but not face it head on and confront it. The issues of grief become important in pastoral ministry, especially among those who believe it is not proper or faithful to be grieving. Sometimes the most faithful ministry is to help the person acknowledge the grief and that it is all right to grieve, and that many ways of grieving are possible and helpful. Grieving needs to be seen as a natural reaction that in time can be healed.

> Grieving is as natural as crying when you are hurt, sleeping when you are tired, eating when you are hungry, or

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[17]Granger Westberg, *Good Grief* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 10.

> sneezing when your nose itches. It's nature's way of healing a broken heart.
>
> Don't let anyone take your grief away from you. You deserve it and you must have it. If you had a broken leg, no one would criticize you for using crutches until it was healed. If you had major surgery, no one would pressure you to run in a marathon the next week. Grief is a major wound. It does not heal overnight. You must have the time and the crutches until you heal.[18]

For some, the word grief is associated primarily with death. Though this is a part of the grief experience of older adults, grief encompasses much more. They also grieve the loss of home, health, occupation, independence, friendships, and family. Those who participate in the project by doing a life review will be dealing with some grief and loss issues, some dealing with death, but some with many other issues.

I believe that there is a connection between grief and theodicy, for many of the theodicy questions arise in times of grief. Why did my husband have to die like this? Why did my daughter die before I did? Where was God when I was in such pain? Why doesn't God just take me now? As a chaplain I often hear questions like these. They arise from the grief and raise the theodicy issue. It is to people in situations such as this that I will direct this project using life review.

The Direction of This Project

Most of what I find in the literature concerning life review is done in a more general way, to help people put the issues and circumstances of life together into a meaningful package. The purpose, specifically, of this project is to use life review with people who are at the present time dealing with

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[18]Harold Ivan Smith, *On Grieving the Death of a Father* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994), 95.

some very real grief issues, and to determine its effectiveness as a tool for doing pastoral care with such persons. In other words, is there anything distinctive to be learned by doing life review with people in grief situations? Is it as effective and useful as at other times? Can it be used as a grief coping tool?

Also, much of the current work is being done in group settings. But for some people, this is just not possible. Sometimes the pain associated with the grief is to strong to risk sharing in a group. Also, while some adults, even older adults are comfortable in group settings, many are not. This is a generation which did not grow up with support groups and the openness of feelings that is often required. Either these feelings were held in or shared only with the closest of friends and family. This purposeful review of one's life will be done in private and only shared to the extent that each desires. The identities of the participants have been held in strictest confidence and every effort has been made to tell their stories in such a way that very few if anyone at the retirement village would be able to ascertain that identity.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT OF MINISTRY

Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, all in purity.

1 Timothy 5:1-2

In this chapter I will give a brief overview of the place where I serve in ministry, its setting, its background and history, the people I serve, and what the particular challenges are for ministry. I want also to touch on how I see our Doctor of Ministry's focus group topic, theodicy, played out in my context.

A Brief History and Background

I serve as the chaplain of Mount Pleasant Retirement Village. Mount Pleasant is located in the small town of Monroe, Ohio, between Dayton and Cincinnati. While only a few of the residents at Mount Pleasant are from Monroe originally, many choose to live here because of the small town, warm, friendly atmosphere.

Mount Pleasant Retirement Village is a part of Ohio Presbyterian Retirement Services (OPRS), headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. OPRS is a not-for-profit organization that seeks to serve the needs of older adults in eight different locations around the state. This is done primarily through retirement communities, though an emphasis is being placed more and more upon providing home health care, not in place of, but in addition to its work in providing housing.

OPRS is guided by its mission statement which is the foundation for all its endeavors.

> *Our mission is to provide older adults with caring and quality services, toward the enhancement of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, consistent with the Christian Gospel.*

OPRS has its roots in the Presbyterian Church, both the United Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church of the USA, but in 1973 it reincorporated as a separate entity and has since operated as an interdenominational corporation. People of various religious affiliation live in the communities, work in the corporation, and serve on the board of directors. Of the 20+ employees on the management team, which includes the Executive Director, Administrator, Director of Nursing, Chaplain, and other department heads, only one is Presbyterian. There are more Methodists, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics in this group than Presbyterians. In fact, the most recent past president of OPRS for more than 12 years was an ordained Lutheran pastor. The current president is not a Presbyterian.

The first construction at Mount Pleasant Retirement Village was begun in 1952 on 10 acres of land. It opened for the first residents in 1953. The first buildings were built by volunteers, putting one in the mind of today's Habitat for Humanity projects. A local newspaper reporter wrote that the

"scorching sun dimmed neither the enthusiasm nor the work of more than 20 volunteers who began construction this week on the new Mount Pleasant Home for the aged. . . . You can't tell the preachers from the laymen. All are garbed in work clothes and all are busy hammering away, sawing lumber and placing completed frames in position. Every single person on the construction job is a volunteer."[1]

A Current Look

Mount Pleasant has grown from that first year with several cottages and a dormitory for 15 residents to a campus with 128 cottages, an apartment building with 72 apartments, and a nursing center with 99 beds plus assisted living. The total population is around 350 with an anticipated growth up to about 500. (See Appendix E for a map of the campus.)

Mount Pleasant is a continuing care retirement community and offers life care to its residents. What this means is, that after entering Mount Pleasant, there is every level of care available to the residents, from independent living up to nursing care, and in the event that their resources are depleted Mount Pleasant will continue to care for them. No one has ever been turned out of Mount Pleasant because the person's income could not meet the expenses.

Mount Pleasant is located between Dayton and Cincinnati, about two miles off I-75. It is several miles from Middletown, which is the closest city to Monroe. There is a hospital in Middletown and most of the residents use this hospital when necessary. The transportation department makes regular and frequent trips into Middletown to a mall, a grocery store, the YMCA, and

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[1]*Middletown Journal,* 7 August, 1952.

to various doctor's offices. There are trips available to a number of cultural and entertainment programs in both the Dayton and Cincinnati areas.

Religious Background

The residents of Mount Pleasant come from a variety of religious backgrounds. While all of those who are residents now list a Christian denomination as their religious affiliation, there have been Jewish residents in the past. No distinction is made from our part; however, knowing that the history and the mission statement stem from a Christian heritage, any prospective residents who are not Christians will most often withdraw themselves from consideration here.

In its beginning, Mount Pleasant attracted mostly Presbyterians as residents. That is understandable, since it was begun, financed, and promoted through the Presbyterian Church. No effort was made to exclude others, but there was a natural association among Presbyterians. Much of the early marketing was done by word of mouth, as residents encouraged former church friends to come and live here. This is still the case to a great degree, as can be seen in a breakdown of the cottage and apartment residents, who represent those who make a non-emergency decision to come to live here. The following chart shows the denomination., the number of residents in the cottages who list that denomination as theirs, and the percentage that this represents.

COTTAGE RESIDENTS BY DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

Denomination	Number of Residents	Percentage
Presbyterian	99	62
Methodist	29	18
Episcopal	6	4

Not Known	6	4
Baptist	5	3
Lutheran	4	3
Protestant	3	2
Roman Catholic	2	1
Church of Christ	2	1
Congregational	2	1
Nazarene	1	1
Total	159	100

The Mount Pleasant Place apartment building is the newest addition to Mount Pleasant, opening for the first residents in July 1993. Only six of the residents were already living at Mount Pleasant. The following chart of the Apartment residents, who represent the newest residents to Mount Pleasant, still shows a high percentage of Presbyterians.

APARTMENT RESIDENTS BY DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

Denomination	Number of Residents	Percentage
Presbyterian	39	52
Methodist	18	24
Not Known	7	9
Lutheran	4	5
Protestant	2	3
Episcopal	2	3
Baptist	1	1
Total	73	100

The Center building, which is nursing and assisted living, has a fair number of residents who came in from the cottages, yet there are many who came in from outside of Mount Pleasant, who enter in a critical situation, with less regard for the background and philosophy of the community. While the highest percentage of residents is still Presbyterian, it is not nearly as high as in the cottages.

CENTER RESIDENTS BY DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

Denomination	Number of Residents	Percentage
Presbyterian	45	36
Methodist	22	18
Baptist	10	8
Roman Catholic	10	8
Church of God	9	7
Not Known	9	7
Lutheran	7	6
Disciples of Christ	5	4
Church of Christ	3	2
Protestant	3	2
Episcopalian	2	2
Total	125	100

Socio-Economic Background

Communities like Mount Pleasant that offer life-long care usually require a certain entrance fee as well as a somewhat higher monthly charge than at rental-only communities. The following chart shows the entrance fees and monthly fees required to live at Mount Pleasant.

AREA	ENTRANCE FEE	MONTHLY FEE
Assisted Living	$18,500	$1705.60 - $2080.00
Independent Living (Center)	$18,500 - $20,000	$1071.50 - $1356.00
Cottages (Single)	$34,000 - $103,000	$359.00 - $535.00
Cottages (Double)	$34,000 - $103,000	$518.00 - $830.00
Apartments	$45,000 - $94,500	$1108.00 - $1393.00
Nursing	None	$3469.50 - $4477.50

Applicants must have assets and income that will reasonably allow them to pay the expected costs. This means that most of the residents are from a higher socio-economic strata than at many other places. The following

breakdown by occupation indicates the background and so is indicative of the income level of the residents here.

INDEPENDENT RESIDENTS BY OCCUPATION

Occupation	Number of Residents	Percentage
Arts	5	3
Beautician	4	2
Business	36	24
Clergy	6	4
Cook	1	1
Computer	2	1
Education	44	29
Engineer	8	5
Farming	1	1
Funeral Director	1	1
Human Resource	1	1
Industry	9	6
Journalism	1	1
Library Science	6	4
Medicine	14	9
Public Service	1	1
Real Estate	1	1
Sales	7	4
Social Worker	1	1
Self employed	1	1
Total	150	100

There are concerns in the field of retirement living generally about the future of such places as Mount Pleasant and the rather high retirement income and/or large assets needed to live in such a place. Some think this will come to a head as baby-boomers enter retirement age, as they have not been able to save or participate in retirement plans as the previous generation did. One of the communities in OPRS has developed some HUD (government subsidized) apartment housing for people of a more moderate means. From the outside

there appears to be little difference in the apartments. There are some differences in the "niceties" on the inside and the perks offered, but the overall quality of life and the meeting of basic needs is not compromised. It is the hope of many that all of the communities can follow suit and expand the base from which we can draw residents.

There are other alternative kinds of housing being discussed, such as congregate living homes. In these homes, about a half dozen people, who do not need nursing care, can live together and support one another in their daily living tasks. There have also been suggestions of providing housing opportunities of a different type than that offered on our campus at another location. This may also appeal to people for whom a move out of their particular community is preventing them from taking advantage of the services that they need.

Our Community Services Department, which provides help in tasks of daily living to both independent residents on campus and in the wider community, is now able to offer services to people who would qualify under Medicaid programs. This allows us to provide services to people who could not otherwise afford our services. This is true also of our Elder Care program, a day service for Alzheimer's and other dementia people who are cared for at home by another family member.

Challenges for Ministry

Ministry at Mount Pleasant must be done as an inter-denominational effort. There is a weekly Sunday worship service, which clergy from the area, most of whom are pastors of the Center residents, lead most of the time. I participate once a month. This service offers worship from a variety of perspectives to satisfy the varied worship styles that are familiar to the

residents. There is a weekly campus-wide service on Wednesday, which is attended by mostly Center residents that is of a more Presbyterian style, e.g. a scriptural Call to Worship, the use of "debts" in the Lord's Prayer. Few Cottage and Apartment residents participate in these services, since most are able to attend a local church. Sunday morning transportation is provided to the local Presbyterian, Methodist, and Roman Catholic churches. A lay person from the local Catholic parish brings the Sacrament of Holy Communion to the Catholic residents weekly.

Bible Studies must be of a general Protestant nature, rather than be reflective of a particular denominational or theological view. This is very hard for me, at times, when I must affirm the right of a person to hold a position that I find offensive or inappropriate, and at the same time be faithful to my beliefs. For instance, I was once asked, "Don't you think that most people are going to go to hell because they haven't asked Jesus into their heart?"

Personal Stories

The following stories are a sampling of those told to me by residents that show in various ways how our topic of theodicy is a real concern for the residents. They will not, of course, use the word, but the concern is very real. If God is all-loving and all-powerful, then where is God in my suffering? Why has such evil come upon me? Why do I deserve what I am going through? Is there any point or purpose to my grief? The stories are all true, with only the names changed.

Lorraine and Victor

Lorraine and Victor were a remarkable couple. They had been married for over 50 years when I first met them. Their love for each other seemed to have only grown over the years. Lorraine didn't get out much, but Victor went all around the area. If he wasn't golfing, he might be at the church or at one of their children's homes or he might be doing chores around the house that were once considered Lorraine's work, chores she is no longer able to do. They were happy people, with a kind word for everyone.

But finally the inevitable happened. Victor's health began to fail as Lorraine's already had. At first the children tried to pitch in so that they could stay at home, but it soon became apparent that this would be an around the clock proposition. Lorraine and Victor, always so independent, didn't want their children to do this. Soon they were living in a retirement village. Over the next few years, as their health continued to fail, they moved from one level of care to another, from the more independent levels, finally to skilled nursing care.

One day when I was visiting them Lorraine turned to me and said, "I don't understand what has happened to us. Why do we have to live out our remaining years like this? I always tried to do what was right. I didn't get married until I was a little older than all the others, but I saved myself for my husband. Why is this happening to us?"

Without trying to unpack everything Lorraine was saying to me through this question, it is quite obvious that one of the things she is questioning is the notion that if you do good things, good things happen to you, and if you do bad things, bad things happen to you. The idea is that God blesses the good people and punishes the bad. But now it doesn't seem to be working out that way.

Fred

Fred was always a large man, and bragged a bit that he was the same weight he was when he married his second wife over thirty years before. But now his body was wasting away from cancer. It was in his esophagus and had completely closed it off. He was fed through a tube put directly into his stomach. He had made a decision not to treat the cancer in any way. His wife had just died less than a year before. His boys all lived away. He had no desire to go through what can be agony in treating cancer. He was ready to die.

One day I got a call to go see him. I had always assumed that one day I would get a call to see him when he was at the end, but it was not his death that concerned us now. The wife of one of his sons had died. He had just seen her a month before. He was so excited that just before Christmas the whole family had made an effort to come and see him. He knew it was the last time they would all be together. Looking forward to that day had kept him going for several months. It was all he talked about.

His daughter-in-law had been ill, but he had no idea that it was this serious. I suspect the family had assumed that he would die first and that there was no need to tell him. He cried as he poured out the whole story to me. Then he stated, "It should have been me."

There is a natural pattern we expect to have happen in life. One generation begets the next who begets the next. We expect that one generation will die off at a time, so that parents will die before their children do. This is only natural to expect. But it is not always the case. If I heard Fred's words correctly, he was questioning the fairness of life. What should happen in one way doesn't always happen like that. Why?

Mary

Mary watched every day as her husband's condition deteriorated. She had tried to care for him as long as she could at home, but it finally got to the point that it was too much for her. Her husband had Alzheimer's disease. She came into the center building several times a day to see him, even helping with his care as much as she was able.

One day she was sharing with me how traumatic it has been for her. It began with her husband just being forgetful. Then it progressed to his wandering and putting himself in dangerous situations. He also at times became combative, a behavior unlike what he was like throughout his life. But she said the hardest part was when he no longer knew her. He recognized her as the woman who took care of him, but he had no idea that she was his wife.

The more we talked she was really asking me, "Why does God allow a person to have a disease like this?" We all know that as we age we will not be the same in body. We feel it at different stages. Much of it is a natural process. But this is no natural process. It is a dehumanizing, hideous, and evil condition. When a person loses the nature of who they are, what do you have left? She could only love the memory of the man who was. The person in the body now is not he.

Mary's husband died. She told me afterward that it was hard to grieve for him now, because she really lost him several years before. She did her grieving then. The body of a man who, in her eyes, died two years before just finally gave up. She was exasperated with life, and perhaps God, for all the senseless time that she and her husband had to endure those last years, with no hope for recovery, and no purpose served for him to live on.

Theodicy and Aging

It is important to remember that most of the residents here gave up quite a bit to come here. Even to come to a cottage or apartment means to give up rooms of furniture, mementos, and memories. Most are people who pride themselves upon their accomplishments and their status in life. To end up in one room with a few pieces of furniture is to call into question a number of "truths" that they have held in life. If "God helps those who help themselves," then, where is God now? If "charity begins at home," then why have I ended up depleting my resources to become dependent upon someone else's charity? These are real issues and questions that the residents wrestle with.

There are many others who attribute the accomplishments of their lives, not so much to their own hard work but to the blessings of God. The understanding is that the reason that they lived such a full life with the richness of the world's offerings is due mostly to their faithfulness to God and God's rewarding of that faith. As time goes on and life changes, this idea is often questioned. The concern becomes, "If living right means ending up with no more than those who squandered all, then why live right?"

It is difficult for many of the residents really to grapple with the issues that we might in a discussion of theodicy. For many of them, even to ask the questions is considered sacrilegious and unfaithful. But the issues surface. Life just isn't ending up for them like it is "supposed" to. Cherished beliefs are proving inadequate. A God that they once understood as a God of all power as well as mercy doesn't seem to be coming through for them. At least in their minds, whether they are ever verbalized or not, the questions of theodicy are alive and well among the aging.

PART II

A PERSONAL LIFE REVIEW

CHAPTER 3

ENCOUNTER WITH SELF, ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

In the womb he [Jacob] took his brother by the heel,
And in his manhood he strove with God.
He strove with the angel and prevailed,
He wept and sought his favor.
He met God at Bethel
And there God spoke with him.
Hosea 12: 3 - 4

The title for this chapter comes from an organization my wife and I are involved with, Lutheran Marriage Encounter. There is one talk the presenters give called "Encounter with Self." It is designed to help individuals look at themselves honestly and then learn from that examination what they need to work on personally to benefit the marriage. The readings for this course have helped me to take a good look at myself, as well as a good look at what I believe about God.

I will first look at each of the readings from the perspective of what each has challenged me to understand about myself and about God. Then I

will look at each from the perspective of where I part company with the author. I will close this chapter with some reflections upon the readings in general. The readings are all current books related to our topic of theodicy.[1]

The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem

James Poling contends that abusive power has become institutionalized in the structures of our society, and uses sexual abuse as a paradigm for this view. While this may be the case, he offers little hope that the problem can be changed.

Poling has challenged me to take a look at how the church has often been a party to the abuse of power, not only of the sexual abuse of women and children, but in many other ways as well. The church has often not spoken out and responded adequately to the pleas of the victims of our world. I sometimes take offense at the magnitude to which I am personally criticized for involvement in this abuse. I think it is fair to judge me for what I can help, but not for what I cannot help. I cannot help that I am a middle-aged, white, male, born and reared in western civilization. For that I am not guilty of a crime. What I do from there, that which I choose to do, for that I am open to criticism. It may be that for the complicity I have in perpetuating the silence of abuse, I am guilty. But how is blaming, berating, and condemning men as a whole legitimate when the same is considered unjust when done to women?

I agree wholeheartedly that abuse in all of its forms is rampant in our world today and that the church has tried to cover it up. We hear story after

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[1]The readings are listed in the Bibliography under the heading Peer Seminar Readings. There are several other books listed in this section that are cited elsewhere in this paper.

story of clergy who have abused others, only to have the church sweep it all under the rug and discreetly move the clergy to another setting. In my own church, I am sad to say, that this has happened in the past. Only in recent years has sexual abuse and misconduct been brought out in the open. In my synod alone there have been at least five reported cases in the past several years. In years gone by not that many cases would have been reported openly in several decades.

I am sure that this is indicative of what is happening in the pews as well. As church leaders we cannot close our eyes to the reality of abuse among our own parishioners. In the retirement community where I work there have been cases of abuse, physically, emotionally and sexually. No segment of the society is exempt. Yet I have heard preachers, including the pastor of the church I attend, say that abuse is not as widespread among those who believe in Christ as among those who do not. While we need not look at everyone suspiciously, we ought not close our eyes to the possibility and probability that abuse can be anywhere. I think that Poling is right in bringing this fact, and the church's historic denial of it, to the forefront.

Where Poling and I part company begins with the subject of hope. There seems to be very little of it in Poling's book. He uses the issues of abuse as a paradigm for how we live in relationship to each other, and does not seem to see much hope that either the perpetrators or the victims will really recover from the abuse. Of the perpetrators he says that "so far our society has not shown the kind of determination required to understand and respond adequately to this problem"[2] and "whether there is enough resilient

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[2]James Poling, *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem* (Nashville: Abigndon Press, 1991), 70.

hope toward justice in God in a world of nuclear weapons may be revealed by whether recovering perpetrators can find new life."[3] Of the victims he is equally pessimistic. He seems puzzled by the hopefulness of many, but apparently sees no way that others can learn from this hopefulness.

> In my work with some survivors, I have been impressed by the resilience of their hope. In the midst of the worst terror and destruction, the spirits of some do not completely lose courage. There are many others whose spirits and resistance are broken and their lives shattered; for these there may be no redemption unless society is entirely transformed.[4]

Poling speaks of his methodology as being Practical Theology. He describes this as arising

> out of the ministry practice of the church. After initial definitions of key terms, like power and abuse as these relate to its personal, social, and religious levels, the study focuses on in-depth case histories that are based on the testimony of survivors themselves. These stories are then analyzed with critical theories that identify systematic distortions and the search for resilient truth in the midst of extreme suffering. From this analysis come theological affirmations, which are used to transform the ministry practice of the church in the future.[5]

Later he writes that "the church must reformulate its images of God" and its "theological assumptions about the relation of God and humankind need to be examined and revised." We must also "study the Bible critically in order to sort out its systematic distortions about the nature of God."[6] If all of this is

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[3]Ibid., 179.

[4]Ibid., 32.

[5]Ibid., 19.

[6]Ibid., 185.

done primarily from the view of the victim, particularly the victim who comes for counseling, it is no wonder that the outlook is not hopeful.

Another troubling thing I find in Poling is that people seem to be easily categorized as victims or victimizers. I think that the reality of life is such that there are many shades of gray in between. Poling seems to devote much of his time and energy to the extremes and tries to make these representative of the whole.

Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy

I think that Wendy Farley does far better in holding out some hope for the future while at the same time taking the suffering of the present seriously. She argues that the creation itself is tragically structured. She draws from Biblical resources as well as from Greek tragedy to describe the kind of tragically flawed world in which we live. She names freedom as this tragic flaw in the creation.

> It is often the case that freedom is more of a burden than a pleasure; we are enervated rather than exhilarated by the possibilities of life. It would be such a mercy, such a relief to hand over freedom to someone else. And so begins the eagerness to believe lies, to assent to whatever is easy and obvious, and to nurture indifference against the exhausting requirements of compassion. The harshness of anxiety and the restlessness of desire condemn freedom to betrayal and defeat. Freedom is the tragic flaw of human existence, at once the stamp of its greatness and its destruction.[7]

As an alternative to the classic idea that good is always rewarded and evil is always, at least in the end, punished, which she maintains comes from

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[7]Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 37.

the idea of the Fall, she says a "tragic vision locates the possibility of suffering in the conditions of existence and in the fragility of human freedom. The very structures that make human existence possible make us subject to the destructive power of suffering."[8] In other words, the very structures that make life meaningful and full of possibilities for good are also the structures that make the reality of suffering possible.

So what then of human suffering? The answer to this is to respond with compassion, as God does, so that we may resist and deny the power of suffering. "Compassion is that power which endures to resist tragic suffering."[9] I would be more inclined to say that God's compassion will overcome tragic suffering, but she does not. She further defines this compassion as

> a mode of relationship and a power that is wounded by the suffering of others and that is propelled into action on their behalf. Compassion resists suffering rather than trying to justify it. It resists suffering by offering whatever comfort and healing, or empowerment it can within the confines of a particular situation.[10]

I find myself in agreement with much of what Farley says about the nature of the world we live in. I cannot find any justification for the kinds of radical suffering she describes and that we all experience, to one degree or another, in this world. The depth of suffering and tragedy in this world leads me to believe that the problem is much deeper than any Fall from goodness that can in any way be recaptured. There is something in the very structure of

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[8]Ibid., 29.

[9]Ibid., 29.

[10]Ibid., 69.

creation that leads to the suffering that we see. It is not just the freedom of humans that has somehow gone astray, though that certainly contributes to our suffering.

I do not think that she takes this idea of tragic flaw far enough. She seems most inclined to use the tragic flaw as the explanation of why we do such things to one another that cause such enormous suffering. However, the tragically flawed world itself does not cause suffering. In my case I see much of my suffering coming from the tragic structure itself, not from any actions of others. This is the nature of much illness. Some illness is brought upon by our own actions, at least indirectly by choosing to engage in activities that can be harmful or failing to care for ourselves in a way that prevents illness. But what we have experienced in our family has been primarily of the nature that there is no known cause. It has just happened. If we live in a world that is created basically good, and if our suffering comes from the misuse of freedom by other human beings, then what I have experienced would not really be suffering. In fact there have been those who have tried to say that it is not really suffering at all, or at least not to the extent that others suffer. Rather than get into a game of 'can you top this' we need to recognize that suffering comes in many different ways, and it is of little value to the one suffering to know that others suffer worse.

It seems to me that Farley is unwilling to take this idea of divine compassion to the logical extreme. At one point she recognizes this. To do so means that the divine compassion may lead to results that she doesn't like. But I think that this is the very nature of God's grace, unmerited love, that God will love, forgive, and redeem what we find unlovable, unforgivable, and unredeemable.

> In the face of sin, compassion becomes determinate as mercy. This is the annoying and insulting thing about compassion: it seems to be too softhearted; it will not take guilt seriously and make itself hard so it can deal with it appropriately. Forgiveness is a virtue, of course, but there are limits; there are times when it becomes a vice. It is disgusting to think of forgiving the murderers at Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen.[11]

Given the tragic nature of this life, it is quite plausible, and perhaps probable that if I had been living in Germany in the 1930's and 1940's, I may have been one of those people for which she holds that to forgive is a vice. Yet I believe that there is forgiveness, even for those that the tragic structure has so perverted sane perspective in life. This is the very heart of the Gospel.

The Wounded Heart of God:
The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Concept of Sin

Andrew Sung Park uses the ancient Asian concept of han to address what he sees as the one-sided view of Christianity in dealing with sin and guilt, and that is viewing it only from the perspective of the sinner. He argues that the perspective of the wronged has been mostly ignored, if not made irrelevant, by the traditional Christian doctrine of forgiveness. He seems to have some difficulty defining han for us, but does a better job of allowing us to experience it.

> Han is an Asian, particularly Korean, term used to describe the depths of human suffering. Han is essentially untranslatable; even in Korean, its meaning is difficult to articulate. Han is the abysmal experience of pain.[12]

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[11]Ibid., 119-120.

[12]Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Concept of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 15.

He tells us of the nature of han and gives some horrifying examples of how han has manifested itself in our world. Han can be individual or corporate in nature, and it can be active, causing rage or passive, with the victim acquiescing to the oppressor. Even nature experiences han. The major roots of han are in the capitalist global economy, patriarchy, and in racial and cultural discrimination. This han is always destructive to the human spirit. It must be exposed if any real change is to take place.

> The anti-human and anti-Christian spirits of capitalism, sexism, and racism have strengthened one another and have denigrated both the dominant groups in society and their victims by destroying their true humanity. Such spirit has spawned han in women, ethnic groups and the downtrodden. The sources of han in the structure of society, as well as in the dynamic intrapersonal reaction of the mind, must be exposed if han is to be resolved.[13]

The contention is that to a great degree, and I agree with Park, Christianity has been indifferent to the victim, and has been more concerned with the sin and guilt of the oppressor. This is because Christianity has become an oppressors' religion. Though it did not start out that way, it has evolved as such through the centuries. It tries to take away the guilt of those who have used and wronged the innocent, downtrodden, and marginalized in every society.

> There is a fundamental problem in the Christian way of thinking about sin: it has been oriented almost exclusively toward sinners. Christianity has been preoccupied with the well-being of sinners/oppressors and has devoted little attention to their victims. This lopsided proclivity reflects itself in all other levels of Christian life, even in such charitable activities as

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[13]Ibid., 67.

> almsgiving and other social services, because these activities are often seen from the viewpoint of the spiritual growth of the sinner/oppressor.[14]

Park, also, has some harsh words for the church, and often rightly so.

> To disintegrate the han of the human race and of the world, the church needs to develop the way of the resolution of han as well as the forgiveness of sin. The Christian gospel can be good news, provided that it is not only for the absolution of the sin of sinners, but also for the resolution of the han of their victims...I do not object to the church's concern with the forgiveness of sin, but I do object to the fact that the church has not developed any doctrine for the resolution of han.[15]

I objected to Poling dividing all people into the victim/victimizer category. Park at times seems to show the gray area in between, but usually holds back, categorizing people as oppressed or oppressor. In the example of foot-binding that he uses, he talks of how it is for the desire of the men, who find the tiny feet arousing, that the practice continues. Yet it is the women who are assigned the task of binding their young girl's feet. Again he tells of a little girl in China, who, because the family is penalized by the government for having more than one child, is suffocated in bed at night because the family wants a son. At first the father tries to do this, but fails. The next night she is suffocated at the hands of her grandmother. It only goes to show that in some manner everyone experiences han at the hands of someone else. We are all victim and victimizer, oppressed and oppressor.

Perhaps because I am a Lutheran I take offense at his objection to the doctrine of justification by faith, as taught by Luther. Also, he puts the cross

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[14]Ibid., 72.

[15]Ibid., 137.

of Christ along side the life of Jesus' life as twin foci of the faith. I think perhaps he prefers the life of Jesus to the cross of Christ. I may be overreacting to this. I may be like the person who became angry at the pastor when the sermon touched home and said, "Now preacher, you've gone too far. You've quit preaching and started getting personal."

Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance.

Christine Smith writes from a preacher's perspective. While I may not find her sermons particularly moving, I believe she is right on track in saying

> preaching is a theological act. A vital preaching ministry includes the skills of the sophisticated communicator, the attentiveness of the Biblical exegete, and the social analyses of the most discerning sociologist, but first and foremost it is the craft and act of a working theologian. It is a theological act because preachers are called to reflect upon, and struggle with, ultimate religious questions in life.[16]

She uses three words to inform the nature of preaching; weeping, confession, and resistance. "In a world filled with human suffering, inequity, and oppression, surely preaching is a kind of weeping."[17] But it is not enough just to weep with and for those who suffer; we must engage in an act of confession as a church, defined as "a time to speak truth about our lives and about the nature of our world."[18] Still, this alone is not enough. Something must be done to seek to change the situation of those for whom we weep.

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[16]Christine M. Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 1.

[17]Ibid., 4.

[18]Ibid., 4.

We must resist. Resistance "is not an act of standing still and defending ourselves against the evil that surrounds us, but is a movement into it, and through it, with speech and presence and action."[19]

I cannot fail to address her Christology. Jesus can serve as a model for "new possibilities," save us from a "fatalistic power of evil" in our lives, and help us to find "at-one-ment with God, the human family, and with the earth." But "there is no inherent goodness in crucifixions. . . ."[20] I will say more about this at the end of this chapter.

Facing the Abusing God

I am not quite sure what to say about David Blumenthal's book. Just when I am about to affirm what he says, he will turn the tables and I find I am offended by what he says next. Blumenthal is absolutely and resolutely sure of God's power as well as the real presence of evil in the world. It is the goodness of God that is in question. While God has a good side, we do not always see that side. God is capable of evil and that is often what we experience. If we expect that God will always be good, we will be disappointed. For there will be times that God is not good, and we must actively engage God at these times, with words of anger and rage.

> In a theology that affirms God's ongoing providence, God's presence in all events, there is, however, the problem of acts of God which are not fair, which do not embody God's just compassion: the suffering of the innocent and the just; natural and human disasters, which strike good and evil persons indiscriminately; child abuse, infant death, debilitating pain,

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[19]Ibid., 5.

[20]Ibid., 158.

> holocaust. This problem is not new, and many answers—theodicies—have been proposed. The beginning of a "solution" to the problem of theodicy in personalist theology is to say that fairness implies dialogue; that there is a standard by which to judge and a means of accumulating credit and debt in all relations, even in our relationship with God and in God's relationship with us. All humankind's acts are debatable; all God's judgments are arguable.[21]

This engagement is possible because God has given up absolute use of God's power in favor of creating a being that can make moral judgment, just as God can. It almost seems to me that what Blumenthal is saying is that God has created a sparring partner. God expects engagement.

> God, however, does have power. God's power is absolute, but God cannot use it absolutely. For, having created a being also capable of moral judgment, God must limit God's own power so as to empower the being God created. Humankind too, thus, has power, though not as much as God. Power is dialectical. It is the intertextuality of God's and humankind's expectations.[22]

Since God shares power, but still maintains more than is shared, like selling off stock, but maintaining a controlling interest, that power can be used in abusive ways. Blumenthal maintains that God indeed does use this power abusively. He is consistent in his condemnation of abuse by both humans and God.

> What is true of abusive behavior by humans is true of abusive behavior by God. When God acts abusively, we are the victims, we are innocent. When God acts abusively, we are the

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[21]David Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993),15.

[22]Ibid., 16.

> hurt party and we are not responsible for God's abuse. Our sins—and we are always sinful—are in no proportion whatsoever to the punishment meted out to us. Furthermore, the reasons for God's actions are irrelevant, God's motives are not the issue. Abuse is unjustified, in God as well as in human beings.
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> But God is not always abusive. God is often loving and fair, even kind and merciful. We know, from our own experience or from that of others as well as from the Scripture and tradition, that God is, indeed, good too, even if our being abused inhibits us from clearly seeing and feeling God's love and fairness, from experiencing God's kindness and mercy. Our gratitude for God's fairness, love, kindness, and mercy, however, does not stop us from acknowledging God's abusiveness.[23]

Is this God who can be so abusive worthy of our worship? How do we relate to such a God? Why continue to believe in and stay with an abusive God. Our advice would be to leave such an abusive partner if we were in an abusive relationship with a person. Why not the same thing for God?

Blumenthal retreats to blood loyalty, tradition, and the Jews being chosen by God. This is why he will remain loyal to a God who can be so abusive.

> Speaking from out of Scripture and depth psychology, I say that ethics is a function of blood loyalty, of tribal kinship, of fierce attachments. Hence right and wrong are defined by blood loyalty. I know that westerners think that this is "primitive" and needs to be transcended by reasoned regulation. I know that Christians think that Christianity transcends this by self-sacrificing love (discounting the passages for punishing the wicked and the doctrines of eternal damnation, etc.). But I wonder whether these sublimations of tribal rightness-wrongness, these purifications of blood loyalty, are correct. I wonder whether the converse is not true: that the original

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[23]Ibid., 248.

> definitions are what God revealed to us as God's will, because they are truer to our deepest natures.
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> I do not want to say that only blood loyalty can serve as a basis for ethics (nor does Scripture) but I do not wish to deny, transcend, or sublimate it either.[24]

I agree that God has given up power voluntarily to create a world in which the creatures have free will and make moral judgments. I can also agree to a God that has ultimate power for the final direction that the creation is heading. But, there is one thing that keeps me from the same conclusion as Blumenthal, and that is the cross.[25] I see in the cross the word of God that this power will not be used against us. As the rainbow is to the flood, so is the cross to the abusive potential of God. This abusive potential was not used against the ultimate rejection of this world, the cross.

A Troubling in My Soul

The book contains the contributions of a number of Womanist theologians. Though each of the chapters speaks from a somewhat different perspective on a variety of topics, the title is very appropriate, as it is obvious that all of these women feel a troubling deep in their souls.

> Womanist reflection is far from monolithic in voice and tone. The contributors to this anthology have a unique perspective on the nature of evil and suffering in the lives of African-American women and the African-American community as a whole. They begin with their particular experience as a rigorous sounding board and offer piercing analysis as they construct an alternative vision. These visions have an underlying theme of justice and equality. However, the method and the

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[24]Ibid., 218.

[25]I do not see the cross as being abusive, but a loving act of God's sovereign will and Jesus' freedom, for the sake of the creation. I will say more about this in Chapter 4.

> strategy to achieve such ends vary in a womanist stance. Rather than appeal to a common methodology, which begets a common ideology, womanist reflection encourages creativity rather than conformity in proposing solutions to evil and suffering.[26]

This is my first encounter with Womanist theology. I have found it fascinating. First of all, as I read the essays, I was struck by the sheltered life I have led. I was aware that there have been abuses, but I was horrified to find the extent of these abuses, especially in the present. I was struck by how it has impacted the African-American women particularly. I was also taken back by the horrors of the past, back to slavery and even the culture of many places in Africa, and that they still have a dramatic impact today. Time and time again I remarked in the margins of the book things like, "I have never heard this before," and, "I had no idea," and, "Unbelievable." It has helped to open my eyes to a world I never knew.

Much of the abuse written about has to do with power, or more properly, the misuse of power. That whites have historically abused Black women did not surprise me, though the terrible nature of it was a shock. What did surprise me was the abuse Black women continue to endure from Black men. The abuse comes also from the structures as they exist today, in society in general and in the Black community as well. It is no wonder that this dominating abuse of power creates such a troubling and that another way of viewing power is sought.

> Power as domination is dysfunctional to society because it inhibits diversity and growth. Power as domination restricts vision and movement and reduces flexibility and responsiveness. Power as cooperation and mutual respect is power in process

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[26]Emilie Townes, Ed., *A Troubling in my Soul* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 9.

> that happens through us. We experience it when we engage in interactions that produce value. Power as cooperation and mutual respect summons us to develop our capacities for nurturance and empathy as well as our interconnectedness.[27]

In addition to this, what should be at least one place within the community to find consolation and hope, the church, often turns out to perpetuate the same abuse of power. Rather than offering a liberating message to Black women, women are faced with additional discrimination.

> Founded, constituted, and led by African Americans, the Black church emerged from a people in bondage, who understood the good news as a liberating message. The church has been comforter, leader, moral agent, intercessor, locus of status, and definer of all that is good and right for a people who fear the Lord. In many communities, it remains the moral center of public activity. . . .Absent from the Black church is any substantive discussion of gender justice as it pertains to women. When one uses the criteria of denying others' full humanity, viewing "otherness" in a negative light, and perpetuating patterns of discrimination as the measure of social evil, one can conclude that the treatment of women in Black churches all too often fits those criteria. There continue to be churches that thwart women's calls to pastor and preach. The excuse that "our church is not ready for a woman, yet" continues to have validity across denominational lines.[28]

I must admit, though, that while in my own denomination women are ordained and said to be on an equal footing with male pastors, because of our call system, the denomination can support women pastors, but cannot overcome the resistance found in many congregations.

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[27]Ibid., 86-87.

[28]Ibid., 41.

Biblical Preaching on the Death of Jesus

There is much that I find myself in agreement with in *Biblical Preaching on the Death of Jesus*. I will have to admit that this is much to my amazement. Though I do not consider myself to be a process theologian by any stretch of the imagination, where we come out on preaching I find much in common. In summary, the authors contend that there is great power in preaching and that this power challenges and influences the listener to become partners with God in working to overcome suffering and injustice in the world.

I think that the authors are too kind when they speak of the renewed interest and need for preaching.

> Preaching has all too often become no more than "talk about" biblical texts—or worse yet, mere talk with no biblical text at all. Such preaching has rendered the pulpit boring and irrelevant and is disastrous for the church, especially in an age of high-tech electronic communication, when the parish preacher must compete with popular television and radio preachers.[29]

I have heard what I would call some downright horrible preaching, in composition, delivery and content. In this and throughout the book it seems that the authors wish to be non-judgmental, and are not judgmental at points where they ought to be. While it is true that Christians may disagree as to what good preaching is, we all know bad preaching when we hear it.

I agree also that to preach Christ today does not mean that we have to give up thinking as 20th century folk and return to 1st century thought. Nor does it mean that we as moderns have all the answers, or at least better ones than the people of the Bible did. We must find a way to be faithful to both.

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[29]David J. Lull, William A. Beardslee, et al., *Biblical Preaching on the Death of Jesus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 17.

Our sermons *should* be "occasions for the increase of the hearers' freedom."[30] Yet there appear to be numerous ways that this is attempted, as Barth, Bultmann, Ebeling, Pannenberg, and Sölle are listed as some who aim for liberation of the hearer through preaching. I may not approach the subject in the same way as the authors of this book, but I certainly agree that the Gospel is a message which sets us free, and that is part of the task of preaching.

The assignment of the Scriptures as "imaginative proposals"[31] has surely been done to some extent throughout the centuries, as is even evidenced in the biblical text by the number of variant texts extant today, particularly in the New Testament. Also, the number of English translations, which in some passages will say absolutely different things, is even more evidence that it happens today. The use of these various translations for their particular slant happens even among those who would ascribe to biblical literalism. But the extent to which the Bible seems to be devoid of any other use than "proposals" is surely an extreme to which I am not aware that the Scriptures have been taken before.

Again, the ends of preaching listed are certainly ends that I would espouse, but I am not so sure of the method for getting there. As for building the church, yes, though it sounds to me sometimes like this church is to be the "politically correct" one. It sounds that if we are confronted by the proposals of the biblical text, we can arrive at no conclusion except to side with the poor at the expense of the oppressors. Could not another generation be confronted by these proposals and side with the wealthy? What about the

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[30]Ibid., 30.

[31]Ibid., 35.

German peasant's uprising in the 1520's or the overthrow of the Shah of Iran? While we are told these are not absolutes, it sounds very near to it to me. Could not a generation be confronted by the proposals of the biblical text and side against dialogue with some religious groups? The book does not make it sound so, since the same Spirit at work among Christians has been at work among the other religions.

As for realization of the truth, again it seems that there is no other response to these proposals than to affirm the view and experience of the poor, black, Hispanic, and female, and to condemn white, middle-class, males as a whole. Do the proposals also call for the poor, blacks, Hispanics and females to view also white, middle-class, males as people who hurt, cry, love, laugh and bleed as they do? I do not see this in the writings of these authors.

I have trouble understanding just what Jesus is understood to be. This may be a problem of my understanding of process theology. Jesus is said to be "God's representative."[32] I have served as a representative of many things, from my church to my work to service organizations. Is that all that Jesus is understood to be? Is there any sense in which Jesus is divine? Is Jesus God's one and only begotten son? Is Jesus simply a human being that God called to perform a task? What makes Jesus different from anyone else who seeks to do God's will?

I have trouble with the understanding of Spirit that I see portrayed. The Spirit works through the Word, but only insofar as it is understood as one among many ways that the Spirit works, and not necessarily the central way. The authors look at Paul and John, who speak of the Spirit working "in Christ" and the "Spirit of Truth" being for the community of believers.

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[32]Ibid., 56.

> These biblical views appear on one level to contradict our more inclusive perspective. Although there are real differences, on another level, when both John and Paul are seen within a larger horizon of meaning, their views can be compatible with ours.[33]

This sounds to me like saying that since they do not seem to agree with what we are saying, we will find a way to interpret them so that they agree with what we already believe. Also, the wide scope of the work of the Spirit puzzles me. Why is the theistic God seen as too big[34] but the Spirit is so big that God's creative-redemptive work is done in all places of the world, without regard to any word about Jesus?

The Spirit is seldom, if ever, called the Holy Spirit. I assume that this is to distinguish the work of the Spirit as process theologians see it from the more classical view. Perhaps saying Holy Spirit gives too limiting a view.

Related to this trouble I have is a more general problem with an understanding of the Trinity. It seems the traditional one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has been replaced with God, God's representative, and an unbridled Spirit. I wonder to what extent these are the same and to what extent they are different? Perhaps I am reading too much in between the lines. At the very least I am puzzled by the authors Trinitarian views.

The Crucified God

Jürgen Moltmann, in *The Crucified God*, attempts to do what none of the other authors do, to put Christology and the cross at the center of

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[33]Ibid., 25-26.

[34]This is a comment made by Tyron Inbody in his unpublished manuscript *Take the Even, Take the Odd*, that sometimes we believe in a God that is too big, and expect that God to do things for which God does not have unilateral power to do.

theology. The cross is seen as an event of love for all of humanity, and is the sign of the deep love of the trinity for the creation. The cross is not presented as a glorious thing to be adored, nor as an abusive action where the Son obediently follows the Father's plan. Rather, it is a willingly accepted act of love which the Son voluntarily suffers and the Father grieves.

> The cross is not and cannot be loved. Yet only the crucified Christ can bring the freedom which changes the world because it is no longer afraid of death. In his time the crucified Christ was regarded as a scandal and as foolishness. Today, too, it is considered old-fashioned to put him in the centre of Christian faith and of theology. . . . Today the church and theology must turn to the crucified Christ in order to show the world the freedom he offers. This is essential if they wish to become what they assert they are: the church of Christ, and Christian theology.[35]

This theology of the cross is not an addendum to some other theology or philosophy, but is the center of all that is said about God. The cross so defines God and God's love in a way that nothing else can.

> The death of Jesus on the cross is the centre of all Christian theology. It is not the only theme of theology, but it is in effect the entry to its problems and answers on earth. All Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ. All Christian statements about history, about the church, about faith and sanctification, about the future and about hope stem from the crucified Christ.[36]

Moltmann is critical of other contemporary theologies that try to make other elements of the Christian faith central. These he calls "Christianized

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[35]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 1.

[36]Ibid., 204.

monotheism" which are long on God talk, but lacking in Christology and Trinitarian doctrine.

> In practice, however, the religious conceptions of many Christians prove to be no more than a weakly Christianized monotheism. However, it is precisely this general monotheism in theology and the belief of Christians which is involved in a crisis of identity. . . . Even the doctrine of grace is monotheistic, and not trinitarian, in practice. Man shares in the grace of God or the divine nature. It is still said that we acquire this grace through Christ, but no trinitarian differentiation in God seems to be necessary. The same thing is true of the doctrine of creation. Faith in the one creator God seems to be sufficient—as among Mohamedans. In eschatology, too, at best there is talk of the coming God and his kingdom or of God as the absolute future. Understandably, Christ then fades away to become the prophet of this future, who fills his function as the representative of the now absent God and can go when God himself comes to occupy his place. Finally, Christian ethics establishes the obedience of man under the rule of God and Christ, and rarely goes beyond a moral monarchy.[37]

I am in agreement with Moltmann that the cross is the center of Christian theology. It is what makes Christianity unique among religions of the world, that its deity could become incarnate and die such a scandalous death. Without the cross, Christianity is nothing more than a religion of the golden rule.

Moltmann helps me to see that Christian theology can be modern, in the sense that it speaks to modern people, and still be Christocentric. I do not develop my thought in the same vein as Moltmann, in that the central nature of the cross is that both the Father and the Son experience suffering, though in

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[37]Ibid., 246-247.

different ways, but that the cross can still be central. I will say more about this in the concluding remarks.

Take the Even, Take the Odd

The final reading is an unpublished manuscript by Tyron Inbody, the working title being *Take the Even, Take the Odd.* It presents a good overview of the subject of theodicy. Inbody, while arguing for his own theological perspective, presents other views on the subject in a very clear and concise manner. He is also willing to commend those positions for what they have to offer pastorally. While rejecting classical theism and its classical theodicy, that in the end we will see that God is really in charge and that what we perceive as evil from God's side is not, he is willing to concede that this can be a very comforting word to many. While rejecting the classical theistic view of God's omnipotence, he at one point offers several suggestions on how a person may be able to hold some form of this classical view and still acknowledge the reality of evil. But in the end, he rejects all forms of classical theism, and argues for a process view. It begins with an appeal to an empirical view of life.

> I am arguing for an empirical orientation to our problem. That orientation leads many toward the concept of the demonic God. . . . Some may find the problems with theism so deep, so offensive, so decisive that no concept of the divine at all can be recovered. For some of us, though, we are still left with a belief in an ultimate source of human good which goes beyond our human resources. The theological problem is how to conceive of this source of human good in such a way as to adequately understand and respond to the evil we experience.[38]

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[38]Tyron Inbody, *Take the Even, Take the Odd,* Unpublished manuscript, Chapter 4, 26.

This thought is continued later in the book, with a reconception of God's power. The real power of God is not unilateral power, but relational power. The power that God has is the power to "shape each other through the mutual empowerment of a relationship."[39] It is this reshaping of God's power that is the primary argument for Inbody. He contends that

> the greatest theological resource we have as theologians and pastors when rethinking the problem of suffering and evil is a series of contemporary reconceptions of divine power which are much closer to the biblical, creedal, and experiential evidence than is classical theism. Both process theologies and contemporary trinitarian theologies describe God's power in radically different ways.[40]

This book has helped me to better understand and appreciate the problem of evil and suffering for the theologian and pastor today. I have also gained some insight into process thought and how it seeks to address the issue of theodicy. However, I am not convinced to be a process theologian.

Process still seems to me to be more philosophy than theology. By that I mean that the empirical view of life tends to develop thought quite apart from thought about God. God talk seems to be an addendum, rather than a central issue. This can be even more strongly stated for its Christology. I will say more about this in Chapter 4. It seems to me that process thought could be just as easily adapted to theologies other than Christian theology. I see nothing uniquely Christian in its reasoning. Finally, from a purely personal, religious point of view, I find little comfort in its view of God.

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[39]Ibid., Chapter 7, 21.

[40]Ibid., Chapter 7, 27.

Concluding Remarks

There are a few general comments I want to make about these readings, as a way of summary. There is an old saying that goes, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water." I think that that is exactly what most of these authors want to do. I would agree that there have been Biblical passages as well as church doctrines that have long been misused in a way that causes abuse and increases suffering among God's people. But I think the question becomes "How can we as a church correct these abuses?" For many of the authors it becomes "How can we eliminate, or at the very least modify, these passages and doctrines?"

Christ and the Cross

With the exception of Jurgen Moltmann, some of the authors in *A Troubling In My Soul*, and David Blumenthal (who being Jewish expectedly does not deal with the cross), I suspect that the other authors could just as well do without Christ and the cross. By Christ I do not mean the historical person Jesus, but the one proclaimed by faith as the Son of God whose birth, life, death and resurrection are the source of faith and life for the church. This may sound like a very harsh judgment, but it is the way I see it.

For example, I suspect that if there were never this Christ of faith, James Poling would have written little if anything differently. His argument is based upon the testimony of abuse victims and some upon the victimizers, and then his reflection upon this testimony, mostly using psychological and sociological arguments for his conclusions. Then, rather than the Christ of faith speaking directly to this issue, the response is to redefine any image of God and of Christ which is in conflict with what he has already determined. Jesus is "fully relational" and thus reflects a God who is fully involved in the

relational web. I suspect that if there were no Jesus to speak about, he would say the same thing about God. Jesus can be used to add to the argument, but is not essential.

I think that the same is true of Smith, Farley, and Beardslee. I understand that this criticism is due to my own bias that Christology is the central doctrine of Christianity. But it also leads me to understand how Moltmann can level the criticism he does that much of modern Christian theology is nothing more than a Christianized monotheism. Christ is not central, nor even integral to the theology. In many cases the things that are said by these theologians are right on the mark, especially their criticism that the Christian church has been party to many abuses, but I see Christian theology as being shaped by our understanding of Christ, not simply finding a way to accommodate Christ. I will say more about this in Chapter 4.

Grace, Mercy, and Forgiveness

The whole notion of grace, mercy, and forgiveness is that those who least deserve them receive them most. St. Paul writes that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." (Romans 5:20) When grace abounds it often turns out that those we would least like to see receive grace, mercy, and forgiveness are the very ones who do. I once asked an adult Sunday School class I was teaching if anyone would be upset if when they get to heaven they see Charles Manson there. At lease half the class held up hands. One man spoke up, saying, "If Charles Manson gets to heaven, then what's the use of trying to live a good life?" I'm sure that he summed up the thoughts of many, not only among that group, but among many Christians, including a number of the authors of these readings for the course. For example, Park says:

> In brief, the doctrine of justification by faith has misled Christians into a one-sided understanding of salvation for hundreds of years. Christianity must reevaluate its oppressor-oriented notion of salvation and reinterpret it in light of dynamic reconciling action between the wronged and the wrongdoer.[41]

Blumenthal writes:

> Life is goring one's enemies, as an ox gores another ox or a person. Life is fierce loyalty to one's family and people. Life is also watching out for, and actively combating, those who would do you in. Life is a jungle. Hatred and jealousy, not love, motivate life.
>
> Why should I forgive my enemy?! especially if he or she has done nothing to indicate any feeling of genuine remorse?! Better to be wary, to return hostility. . . . Better to know and acknowledge one's enemies, to be ready to gore them.[42]

The whole notion of grace, mercy, and forgiveness is a very difficult one. It often goes contrary to our sensibilities. However, I think that it is the very nature of God to go against our sensibilities. To give life through the cross is the supreme example.

Institutional and Societal Evil

I would be remiss if I did not comment on the themes of institutional and societal evils. These are the places where many of the contemporary authors find the greatest evil and thus the greatest source of suffering among the people today. I have not said much about this so far, since, perhaps being a white male, I have not experienced the structures of church and society as evil or a source of my suffering. In fact, it is through many of the structures,

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[41]Park, 96.

[42]Blumenthal, 97.

particularly the church, that I have found much relief and comfort in my own times of suffering. I can only speak from my own experience.

Yet I hear the cries of those who have a different experience. What I read and hear about how the structures of societies have been the source of and added to the suffering of people has opened my eyes to a reality in life that I have not myself experienced. The fact that I have not made much of what seems to be so central in the thought of many contemporary writers should not be seen as any disregard for the suffering others have had.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Who is like the wise man?
And who knows the interpretation of a thing?
Wisdom makes one's face shine,
and the hardness of one's countenance is changed.
Ecclesiastes 8:1

The thrust of the peer seminar I was in dealt with the subject of theodicy. The word comes from two Greek words that mean "to justify God." It is an attempt to explain the existence of evil in the face of an all-powerful, all-merciful God. In this chapter I will deal briefly with my own views of God's goodness and power, as well as the existence of evil. Next I will examine two passages of Scripture to understand the place of evil in the creation and the love of God in Jesus that we see in the cross. Then I will outline an image of God, incorporating these views. Finally, I will share a personal story, so that my image of God is not just a theological construct but a very practical part of my faith. Theology and faith are opposite sides of the same coin. My faith experience informs my theology and my theology gives me comfort and hope in my faith struggle.

What's Wrong with this Picture?

There are puzzles made for little children today that are line drawings with things in the picture that don't make sense. The picture may show a man with duck's feet, a woman with three arms, and other things of this sort. The child is supposed to then determine what is wrong with the picture. At first glance the picture appears to make sense, but upon closer inspection we see that something is wrong.

There are times in our lives when the picture we have of God becomes very puzzling. We have been taught to count on God for comfort and relief in times of trouble, and for hope and peace in times of distress, but sometimes we find only dissatisfaction and suffering, despair and turmoil. One woman who had a skin growth removed, only to find out that her worst fear was realized and it was cancerous, said, "I prayed to God, but it didn't help." We find ourselves like the Psalmist, crying out, "I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long" (Psalm 38:6). We wonder, in our greatest troubles, if God is all powerful and God is all good, why is this evil thing happening to me? Could it be that God is not all powerful, or that God is not always good, or that what is happening to me really isn't evil, but some good in disguise?

Daniel Simundson in his book *Where is God in My Suffering?* addresses this very issue.

> The question of suffering raises for us this difficult question about God's power as over against God's mercy. We want a God who has both attributes. As long as everything goes well for us and we do not suffer excessively (we lead reasonably prosperous and pleasant lives, and we don't come too close to other people's suffering), then we are able to keep these two characteristics in balance. God is both merciful and powerful.

> God cares for the hurting of the world and does something about it.
>
> But when the innocent suffer, when children and old people are victimized by the powerful and greedy . . . then we have a hard time believing in a God who is both merciful and powerful. "Why doesn't God do something?" we ask. . . .
>
> If we must choose between one of these alternatives—and it is at times of suffering that we are most likely to feel we are being forced into one or the other—which is better? Which is least disturbing? If we must choose to give up a belief in God's mercy or a belief in God's power, which would be easier to handle?[1]

I have known people who would say that this is no problem at all. One person may say, "There must be a reason" (denying the reality of evil) and then say, "God can't do it for you" (God doesn't have all power) and then again question, "Why is God doing this to me?" (questioning the goodness of God). I have even heard statements like these, all from the same person, depending upon which remark was the most convenient at the time.

Am *I* willing to give up the reality of evil? This is the first question to be answered. While it is tempting to go this route, and it makes my struggle with God much easier, since it really takes God off the hook for what I have experienced in life, I cannot bring myself to deny finally the reality of evil. By evil I mean anything that works against the well-being of the creation, and especially of human beings.[2] The holocaust is evil. The fighting in Bosnia is

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[1]Daniel J. Simundson, *Where is God in My Suffering,* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1983), 52 - 53.

[2]There is a good discussion of this by Marjorie Suchocki in *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin and Relational Theology,* (New York: Continuum, 1994),especially Chapter 4, "The Criterion of Well-being." She argues that God is characterized by truth, beauty and love. To desire and work for truth, beauty, and love in all of creation is to seek its well-being. My criticism of this view is that there is no uniqueness to the relationship that God has with human beings or the distinctive revelation of God in Christ.

evil. Purposely drowning two children is evil. The hunger of a child is evil. Alzheimer's disease is evil. No rationalization for evil I have heard yet has ever seemed adequate to explain what appears to me to be so evil. I think I have heard every attempt to explain that these are not really evils, ranging from the thought that "God is saving you from some worse fate" to "God is building character in your spirit" to "God is testing you." They are all inadequate for me.

Perhaps a further word is needed concerning my definition of evil. To some, evil only describes that which one purposely does to another. Other events which cause ill-being, such as disease or natural disasters, are tragic, but not evil. They are simply built into the system. They come our way as a result of chance or luck. This is not to downplay the devastating effects that they have in a person's life, but cannot properly be called evil. The word evil is used only in a narrow sense for those deliberate acts of one's will. At least one of the things I find inadequate in this use is that too much of what I might call evil is then rationalized away. This is often done through the use of genetic or environmental arguments. For example, if a person drives drunk and kills someone in an accident, the act may not be seen as an evil act if one believes that the abuse of alcohol is genetically programmed and that there was probably little or nothing that the person could do about it. It was not intentional, but rather simply a result of genetic predisposition. Again, murder could be shown to be not evil if a person's environment was such that the person did not have the values instilled while young to have the capacity to see murder as something wrong. It may be possible someday to reduce all events to the tragic rather than to evil.

My definition of evil would include both disease and nature. For the definition is based upon the results it has on others, rather than its etiology.

As an example, in the book *How People Die*[3], Sherwin B. Nuland tells a story about Janet and Phil Whiting, a couple he had known since the late 1930's. They were a couple that he describes as having a movie-star quality and that their genuine love and affection for each other never waned. He had lost track of them for many years, but came across them almost forty years later. They were still the very loving couple they once were, yet some things were beginning to change. Phil had stopped reading books, something he had avidly done all his adult life. He refused to let Janet out of his sight, something very uncharacteristic of him. He went to the wrong barbershop and became irate with the barber for neglecting the appointment he had made.

The symptoms of Alzheimer's disease were already apparent, though no one wanted to say it. One morning, after a party Janet and Phil had hosted the previous evening for some long-time friends, Phil had no recollection of the party. In time he became paranoid, accusing her of having an affair with his cousin, long since dead, whenever she left the house. He became violent, throwing her valuable antiques at her. At one point he confused her for his sister, and eventually saw her as a stranger in his house, out to steal his wife's possessions. It became so bad that the police had to be called in. They coerced him into the police car so they could take him to the hospital. From there he went to a nursing home. Now the diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease could not be denied. He lost the ability to associate the right words with what he wanted to say, and finally lost the ability to talk. He lost weight so that the skin on his once rotund body sagged, because he had forgotten how to chew. He paced incessantly until he would collapse from exhaustion. He recognized

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[3]Sherwin B. Nuland, *How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter,* (Vintage Books, 1992).

no one, not even himself. He became totally incontinent and unaware of it. He finally collapsed while walking and could not be revived. Janet's response was that of gladness. This whole ordeal was over for them both. Nuland then remarks, "And so ended the destruction of Phil Whiting."[4] His death was less merciful than a bullet through the head, an act we would most certainly call evil. In my opinion, an event that produces such pain, suffering, anguish, destruction, and devastation to both subject and family is evil.

Because there has been so much "unexplained" illness in my family, that for which there is no rationally known reason, e.g. bacteria, virus or genetics, I perhaps am more inclined than some to see illness as evil rather than as just some bad luck or chance. Hauerwas argues that as moderns we believe that

> sickness should not exist because we think of it as something in which we can intervene and which we can ultimately eliminate. Sickness challenges our most cherished presumption that we are or at least can be in control of our existence. . . .
>
> . . . [We] interpret all illness as pointless. By "pointless" I mean that it can play no role in helping us live our lives well. Illness is an absurdity in a history formed by the commitment to overcome all evils that potentially we can control.[5]

Perhaps this is why some are so reluctant to call illness evil, it may be an evil we cannot overcome. I agree with Hauerwas that the solution is not to redefine illness so that it is not evil, but to seek comfort in times of suffering.

> I suspect that if Christian convictions have any guidance to give us about how we are to understand as well as respond to suffering, it is helping us discover that our lives are located in

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[4]Ibid., 102.

[5]Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 62-63.

> God's narrative—the God who has not abandoned us even when we or someone we care deeply about is ill.[6]

Am *I* willing to give up an omnipotent God? Good question! I wish I had a simple answer! The best I can do is a qualified no. Can I give up a God who abuses? Yes. Abuse always works against the well-being of another. Can I give up a God who creates havoc for no apparent reason? Yes. No well-being is served if the only reason is some resolution at a time when it no longer matters. Can I give up a God who is at best indifferent to the suffering in the world? Yes. Such a God is of no value to my life. Can I give up a God who is more powerful (in any sense of the word) than any of the other influences in my life, a God who is beyond and other than this creation, a God who has some ultimate purpose for the creation and is leading it somewhere? No. Such a God would seem to me a pathetic being, at the mercy of its own creation. I *am* willing to say that many of the images we have of God as the omnipotent being are not at all what God is. I am *not* willing to say that God is not finally sovereign over all, even evil.

When I was in the seventh grade I still had a heart murmúr that was first detected when I was an infant. Since by age 12 it had not changed, I was sent to a specialist. It was determined that I had a hole between two of the chambers of my heart. There was no doubt in the cardiologist's mind. Open heart surgery was necessary. This was not a surgery to be taken lightly in 1963. The physician was persuaded to do a heart catheterization by some of his colleagues, just to be sure. And so it was done. The night before I went to the hospital our pastor came to our house to pray. While I was in surgery my parents went across the street to a church to pray. The results of the test

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[6]Ibid., 67.

came back, "Functional Murmur." That is another way of saying, "Your heart makes a funny noise and we can't find a reason why." There was no hole where the doctor was sure there was.

How do we explain this? It would seem simple and logical to say that a misjudgment had been made. Would the outcome have been different without the prayers of many faithful people? Did God look with mercy upon a scared boy and his family? Would a doctor go ahead with a surgery as serious as this without the catheterization if he were not thoroughly convinced? I no longer have the murmur. Is this just a matter of nature? Was there a miracle? Was I healed? There are easy answers and there are hard answers to these questions. The easiest answer is that the doctor was mistaken. I think the hard answers are that God in some way God intervened and that the outcome was different than it would have otherwise been. That's the harder answer to believe, since it creates as many questions as it answers.

Am *I* willing to give up on the goodness of God? No, but I am willing to give up some of the images of a good God that we sometimes have. If by goodness we mean that God rewards our hard or sincere efforts with goodness, then I do not believe in the goodness of God. It could be that this is because of my Lutheran background, where people do not claim a right to receive the goodness of God; it comes as a gift without our deserving. No work, no matter how just in itself, can merit any benevolence from God.

There is an illustration of this in the book *Andrew, You Died Too Soon*[7], by Corinne Chilstrom. Corinne is a Lutheran pastor and wife of Herbert Chilstrom, former Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In this book she chronicles their family grief experience following

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[7]Corrine Chilstrom, *Andrew, You Died Too Soon,* (Augsburg Publishing, 1993).

the death of their 18-year-old son, Andrew, who committed suicide. It happened on a Sunday morning. They called seven of their friends to come to the house.

> At some point that morning we made a surprising discovery. Ordinarily, all of them go to 9:00 Sunday morning worship. But for some reason they had been delayed. Dressed and ready for church, each of them answered when we called, and within seconds were in their cars headed for our home. Later when we wondered about this phenomenal timing we called the police station to check the exact time our call had come in that morning—9:02. All of them should have been gone, but they were right there beside their phones. All of them. Did God intervene in our need? If so, why did God not intervene to stop Andrew from taking his life? I wondered.[8]

But she never answers her questions. As she works through the grieving process, her silence, coupled with the comfort she finds in the Scriptures, especially in the lament Psalms, almost makes finding an answer to these questions seem unnecessary. She then learns to pour out her feelings to God through the praying of several lament Psalms.

> I experience the presence of God, coming powerfully through the Word, acting on my behalf, not only convincing me that *he can heal me*, but I begin to realize that even *now*, God is with me, working, emptying me of sorrow, filling me with his powerful presence, giving new life. *Healing is happening now!* New *trust* comes. I know not how! It is a gift! It is a fresh creation. Out of the ashes of my sorrow God is raising me up. I want to live again. I want to love again. I feel a joy in God's presence as deep as the sorrow. How can I ever thank him enough for this miracle?[9]

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[8]Ibid., 23.

[9]Ibid., 81 - 82.

Is God then always good? I would say yes, if we mean that God always chooses not to do evil but to do good. I would say yes, if we mean that God struggles with the same battle between good and evil that we do, always choosing good. I would say yes, if we mean that God always desires good for us, knowing that the reality is that evil will come along with it.

A Look at Two Bible Passages

The idea that evil and good are related in the very nature of the creation I find in the Scriptures. I have most often seen the first creation story used when the emphasis is upon the inherent goodness of creation. I prefer to begin an understanding of the relationship of God, creation, and evil with the second creation story, Genesis 2:4b - 3:24. Following this is a discussion of the word from the cross, "Father, forgive them." In this passage I find God's response to the question of evil.

Creation

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die"

Genesis 2: 15 - 17

In this passage there are several themes that I see repeated throughout the scriptures that inform my understanding of God and God's relationship to us. First of all, there is freedom of choice. God explains the ground rules for living in the garden. They include eating of the fruit of any tree there except of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Even the tree of life is not off limits, only the tree that brings knowledge of both good and evil. It is only

after the man and woman eat of the tree that they are banished from the garden, not as punishment, but in order to prohibit them from eating of the tree of life. But they are given the freedom to make this choice to eat or not to eat. Basic to the creation of human beings is the ability to choose. They are not puppets, but given freedom, which naturally includes the freedom to make bad choices.

This leads to a second point. Why would the tree of the knowledge of good and evil be prohibited? Wouldn't God want the people to know good? In this creation story, unlike that in Genesis 1, good is not inherent in the creation. It is more of an attribute conferred upon it, and the knowledge of good is not something natural to the people, rather it is given in the eating of the fruit. Note that good comes with its companion evil. They are a package. God knows that if you have knowledge of good, you also have knowledge of evil. Good is a judgment made upon something. You can make that judgment only if you have something to judge it against, and that would be evil. God is not so much forbidding good as recognizing that they will know evil. And so in that day you will surely die.

I do not see this as some kind of original sin. I could see that conclusion if there were two trees in the garden, a tree of good and a tree of evil. But this is not the case. There is only one forbidden tree containing both. If the choice was made to have evil rather than good, then I think there would be a valid argument for some original sin, at least some propensity toward evil. Instead, a choice was made to know both good and evil. And so, we human being have the capacity for both.

Finally, what about God? If knowing good implies also knowing evil, does God know evil, too? Yes. If God has the capacity to do good, does God also have the capacity to do evil? I would like my answer to be different

than it is, but I will have to say yes. I would like to be able to say that God does not have this capacity to do evil. This would make all questions about God much easier to answer. But if things are so structured that one implies the other, it does for God as well.

Then how do we know that God will not use this evil against us? Some would say that we do not know that God will not. There is much evidence in the Bible that many of God's people have always believed that God can and does use evil against us. David Blumenthal would argue that God is good, but also abusive.[10] They go hand in hand. I find the answer to the question above in the cross. The cross is God's word that the evil will not be used against us. Unlike us, who succumb to the use of both good and evil, God chooses to do only good.

A Word from the Cross

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Luke 23: 34

I think that these words have haunted me from the first time I heard them. How could a person nailed to a cross say such a thing? I can understand most of the other words of the cross quite well, especially the feeling of abandonment by God. But why forgiveness? Why not hate? Why not anger? Why not a curse? Why not the abandonment of the world in return? These make more sense to me.

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[10]"*God is abusive, but not always.* God, as portrayed in our holy sources and as experienced by humans through out the ages, acts, from time to time, in a manner that is so unjust that it can only be characterized by the term 'abusive.' In this mode God allows the innocent to suffer greatly." Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, 247.

I do not find the usual pious answers about Jesus, that he is so kind and loving and gentle, very helpful. That does not explain such an action. Nor would any thought that because of Jesus' divine nature his suffering was different from ours. That would only diminish any identification with us. There must be something else going on here.

God creates us for relationship. Without getting into what the nature of that relationship is, it is for relationship with God that we exist. God has had every opportunity and every reason to say, "Enough is enough"; the evil before the flood, the murmuring in the wilderness, the forming of the golden calf, and succumbing to having an earthly king all are times that have shown God's disfavor with the people. But in every case, in the end, God remains faithful to God's word and seeks to restore the relationship. This word from the cross shows the extent to which God will go for that relationship.

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1: 14). This is the Word that hangs upon the cross. It is the place that the Word chooses of his own free will to go. It is not a coercive plan of the father, or an abusive act over which the Word has no other option. Within the Trinity, the decision is made to love the creation and restore the relationship at any cost for all time.

Yet it is a decision made, not in cosmic isolation from the creation, but, in the midst of the down-and-dirty living of life. It has everything to do with the creation. God can exist without this relationship, for God did before there were people. It is not for God's sake that the Word is made flesh but for the sake of the people. "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (John 1: 12 - 13). The

cross is an action God takes at least as much for us as for God. It is motivated by the compassion of God toward the creation. We see this from the time of Moses at the burning bush, when God says, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians" (Exodus 2: 7 - 8). It is the way of Jesus, the Word incarnate, to do the same. "When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, for they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9: 36). The motivation for Jesus on the cross is not so much an internal working of the Trinity, but a coming together of Trinity and humanity, for the sake of the relationship between both.

The price God pays for the sake of the relationship is to suffer. The suffering of the son is different from the suffering of the father, yet they both suffer. But isn't that the nature of being in relationship? And the deeper the relationship, the greater the capacity for the suffering. The greater the love, the greater the hurt when that love is rejected. For the Word to go to the cross is to face the ultimate in rejection from the partner in relationship. God not only suffers in the death of the Son and the grief of the Father, but also suffers in the rejection of the creation.

So Jesus' word from the cross for forgiveness becomes an ultimate word that God will continue to love beyond the suffering, will not abandon the creation, and will always do good for sake of the relationship. The words are so haunting because they are what we as human beings might want to do, but find that we cannot do. Perhaps that is why we find it so hard to believe that a God with a capacity for evil will always choose to do good.

An Image of God

To one extent or another we have some image of what God is like. Some people can visualize (so to speak) in philosophical terms and others in metaphysical terms. My brain works such that I need to speak in images from my experience. I can pull from what seems right and say that God is like this or from what seems wrong and say that God is nothing like this. It must be understood, too, that every analogy breaks down somewhere, otherwise we are not talking of analogous things but the same thing. With this in mind, let me give it a try.

One of the things I understand best in my life is being a parent, especially a father. I understand both the tradition of calling God father and also the terrible consequences this raises for some. But my understanding of being a parent is certainly much different from that of being a parent in the first century. Also, everything related to being a parent is not analogous to some thought about God. But it is the place I begin.

I remember holding my children in my arms shortly after their births. Here were these children with so many possibilities before them, and it was my responsibility to help them grow to achieve of those possibilities what seems best for them. While I do not plan out everything in their lives, I have hopes and dreams. The dream is not as specific as, "I want you to be a doctor," but more general as, "I want you to find and do that which gives meaning to your life. Do that which makes you happy, for which you have the ability, and which gives you satisfaction." And then the journey begins.

But there are no guarantees. Just as I know that there are wonderful possibilities before them, I know also that there are all sorts of evil that may befall them. I have kidded with my children at times, saying such things as, "You're growing so tall I'm going to put a brick on your head so that you will

stay small." Obviously I don't really mean to do this, but I say it in part because I want to protect them from what can happen. I want them to know the good, I want them to avoid the bad. But I can't do this. As a parent who has given life to two children, along with the good will come some of the bad. My hope is that the scale in life tips to the good side.

I see, too, that at least in the beginning, I have what seems like great power over my children. I can literally help to shape life or cause death. My child is totally dependent upon me. There is nothing my child can consciously do to improve its life. Even its breathing is involuntary. At that time I pledged to do all for my children that I can that is good for them.

I remember when we had trouble getting one of our children to go to sleep at night without rocking the child to sleep and very gingerly putting the child in the crib in the hope that this would not awaken it. Every time the child woke up at night we went through the same procedure. It was not good for us or for our child. Of course the pediatrician said, "Just let the baby cry it out. After a few nights you won't have any problem." It broke my heart to hear my baby cry. I'm sure my child didn't understand and might have felt abandonment. It was hell for us both for a few nights. I had to go to the basement and turn a TV on loud enough not to hear the cries. But when our child learned to adjust, we were all the better for it.

The analogy I see here is that, while God is the creator of life, giver of life, and sustainer of life, God does not forge and shape every aspect of our lives. Everything does not happen for some good purpose. But there may be those things that do happen for our own good that we may never understand. The where and how of God's involvement in our lives and God's calling of good out of the evils in our lives still remains a mystery to me. I am not willing to give up that God has power superior to mine or to anything else

that makes a claim upon my life. But I also do not always see the rhyme or reason for how God uses that power.

The claim that if we could see it all from God's perspective we would see that everything that happens in life is really good and not evil does not satisfy me in the least. The assertion that God does not have such unilateral power as to cause certain things in life to either happen or not happen leaves me cold and empty. Both of these positions do an adequate job of getting God off the hook for evil in my life, but I'm not sure I want God off the hook. I see God as very much on the hook! In fact, what is theodicy if we simply redefine our understandings to the point that God is no longer responsible? And I believe that God chooses to stay very much on the hook, for God stays involved in our lives.

As a parent, will I ever be off the hook with regards to my children? The things that I do, the decisions I make, the direction that I lead my children will have many lasting consequences. When they turn 18 or 21 or get married and they are "on their own," am I then off the hook? No! They will take with them much of what they learned about living from the days when I was most responsible for them. I cannot just rationalize all of my behavior and decisions away. I cannot do the same for God and bring myself to just say, " Oh, well, God, I know you have either got a very good reason for this to happen or you could not do anything about it."

The Proof is in the Pudding

The theological construct I have just outlined means nothing if it does not address the reality of my experience. It is of no value if it does not bring personal, as well as pastoral, comfort to me. Only if it does this can it be called Gospel, good news. This has come home clearly to me in the recent

death of my father. I have been forced to ask myself, "Do I find any comfort in a God who has given freedom for both good and evil, who allows us to experience evil in order that we might also experience the good?" I have found the answer to be yes.

Let me begin with a few words about my father. One of the greatest pleasures in his life was his service in the United States Navy, and in particular his service on a submarine during World War II. He was the Chief on the submarine, meaning that he was the highest ranking non-commissioned officer aboard. I say it was a treasure because through this experience he found purpose, satisfaction, camaraderie, pride, and honor. After retiring from 23 years in the Navy, and then later from the U. S. Postal Service, he became heavily involved in the U. S. Submarine Veterans of World War II. He contacted former shipmates and encouraged them to join. He attended conventions locally, statewide, and nationally, where he renewed friendships. He became Ohio State Commander of the organization, and one year was recognized at the national convention as State Commander of the Year. He even gave a speech in Washington, D. C. when a submarine veteran's memorial plaque was dedicated at the Navy Memorial. The experience of the Navy was indeed a great source of joy. He was buried in his dress uniform.

His experience in the Navy, however, was at least partially, if not mostly, responsible for his untimely death. The submarine in which he served was loaded with asbestos, especially in the engine room where he spent a great deal of time. The submarine was built in 1922, long before any dangers of asbestos were known. The asbestos fibers in his lungs most likely caused him to develop lung cancer, which then spread to the bones. But it was impossible to detect the lung cancer early, since the scar tissue from the

asbestos exposure clouded any chest x-ray. The very experience which brought him so much happiness also ended his life.

But this is exactly what I am saying our experience of life is like, and what our understanding of God is about, that good and evil are so intertwined that there can be no separation. To experience one is to experience the other. Nothing is all good, nothing is all evil. The tree in the garden was the tree of the knowledge of both good and evil. Life is a struggle to enjoy the good and avoid the evil, a struggle that can never be completely accomplished. This is how the world is created. God has given us the possibility of knowing love, joy, peace, beauty, and hope, but along with it comes hatred, unhappiness, anguish, ugliness, and despair.

Can I be angry with a God who would create such a world? You bet! As I watched my father suffering away to nothing in a hospital bed, I can certainly question whether or not the possibility of good is worth this price of evil. And I did! It cuts to the soul to watch someone you love die in such an agonizing way. If God could make it be any other way, in a time like this I would want it to be. But if to give up the suffering means also to give up the joy, it seems better to have the possibility of suffering and also have the joy. This is where I finally come out.

I would love to have my father back, but if the only way I could have him back is to have him suffering in the hospital bed, then I do not want him back. I see that the good and evil of life are so intertwined that you can't have one without the other. To give up one is to give up the other. When the grief is so bad, I might, at that moment, wish to give up the good to avoid the evil, but in retrospect, the beauty and joy that God gives us is finally worth the evil, if there is no other way to have the good. What God gives in the possibility for good in life I would not give up to live a life with no evil. For

what would such a life be? It is impossible to imagine, except that it would be at the very least boring and uneventful. Good would be a meaningless term, for nothing could ever be any other way. It would be like saying, "What would people be like if they were not human?" or "What would life be like if we did not need oxygen and water?" Who would know? What difference would it make?

Since my father's greatest joy came form the very experience that brought about his early death, the only way to not have the death is to not have had the experience that brought such joy. In the final analysis, I would give him the joy, despite the cost. I think that is what God does for us. I have not addressed the very sticky issue of how the joy my father found is intertwined with the evils of war. It is very hard, if not impossible, to identify sometimes where good ends and evil begins.

At the end of my father's funeral service, his friends filed by and saluted his closed casket. I can imagine him, somehow, saluting back.

CHAPTER 5

SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Life review is all about telling the story of one's life. In this project I particularly want to examine one's life story in light of one's relationship to God. This chapter is an attempt to do that with my life.

Personal Reminiscences

Daughter

In late January of 1994 I sat on the floor of my daughter's room, tightly clutching her, rocking back and forth with her, shedding tears with her. Sitting with her on her floor was not a new experience for me. I had been doing it for more than 16 years.

When she was young, we spent time on her floor with me holding her, reading a Golden Book, reciting nursery rhymes, and singing a few songs. We would laugh, giggle, and tickle one another. As she got older we would sit on the floor and color pictures, or maybe play a game of Duck, Duck, Goose. But this time it was different.

There are no happy memories of my sitting on the floor with her that January night. I had to hold and comfort her because she had once again seen a shadowy figure in her room, beckoning her to come to him. She had heard voices coming from her closet, including the voice of her grandfather, dead now for almost two years. She was screaming and crying. I was praying and crying. She was suffering from depression and had not been out of the house much for two months. We tried to do all we could, but we could do no more. I didn't ever want to sit on the floor with her like this again. When I thanked God at her birth for my little girl, and dreamed of all to come, I had nothing like this moment in mind.

Son

On Halloween night of 1993, my 11-year-old son did not feel well enough to go out for Trick-or-Treat. Instead I stayed out on the porch while he remained in the house with his mother. Without that time together his mother may not have noticed something very significant. Later that night she told me that he was using the bathroom very frequently. He was always thirsty, drinking something constantly. We put this together with some other clues, such as getting up in the middle of the night, eating like a horse but still losing weight, and a lack of energy. A trip to the doctor was in order.

We both work in health care fields. We knew what all these signs meant, but we didn't want to believe it. When we told the doctor what we

had observed, he did a blood sugar test. Much to our horror, but not to our surprise, he said, "My monitor only goes up to 400, his blood sugar is off the scale. Normal is between 80 and 130. You need to go to the hospital right away. Your son has diabetes." After a quick trip home to pick up a few things, we were off to the hospital, still hopeful that the initial diagnosis was wrong, but it was not.

We literally spent the next four days at the hospital, not only getting his blood sugar under control, but learning all that we would need to know to deal with this disease at home. We learned to do blood sugar tests, draw up insulin, give shots, and prepare meals for a diabetic. We knew at that point our lives would never be the same. Our daughter was already beginning to suffer from some of the symptoms of her troubles, but this was only the latest in the events that tested our faith.

Wife

In August of 1991 we were not home when our children went to school for the first day of that school year. We had never missed a first day of school yet, but we couldn't help this one time. We were in Rochester, Minnesota, at the Mayo Clinic. Just a year before my wife had learned that she had a liver disease. It was finally determined to be a rare, auto-immune disease, for which there was no known cause and no known cure. Research into this disease was being done at Mayo Clinic. It would be the best place for us to go.

Their testing confirmed the diagnosis of a year ago. There was no mistaking. There was some medication that showed promise for the slowing of the progression of the disease, but nothing could halt it or cure it. Some day her liver would stop functioning. At that time she would need a liver

transplant. It could be a few years down the road, but more likely about a decade. Perhaps the medication could put that moment off a while longer, but not forever. We were thankful for their candor, but greatly disturbed by the outlook. Is a life in Christ to look to the future like this?

Parents

In July of 1990, my wife's father called. Her mother calls us often, but not her father. I took the call. I only remember him calling twice before. About three weeks before we were married, I happened to be at my wife's apartment when he called to tell her that her grandmother died. The next time he called it was to tell us that her favorite uncle had died. This time he called to tell us that they had been out riding their motorcycle and that they were struck by a car. Her mother was alive, but in very bad condition. They didn't know if she would make it. Also, she lost part of her leg when the automobile hit them.

It was an almost four hour trip to the hospital where she was. It seemed like four days. There was no way to reassure ourselves that all would be well. We didn't know if it would be. When we walked into her room, if I hadn't know that we were in the right place I would not have recognized her. I had seen people before in as bad a condition, but never someone so close to me. I nearly passed out and a nurse helped me to a chair. What being at the wrong place at the wrong time can do! In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, not only can a trumpet sound, but lives can be forever changed.

In March of 1992, my father-in-law called again. My mother-in-law had recovered. They both retired and bought a home in Arizona to live part of the year and get away from Ohio winters. I wondered, what bad news would we hear now. But there was none. He just called to talk. After a few

minutes of chit-chat, the conversation was over. We learned later that he also called my wife's sister, again just to talk.

Shortly after we went to bed that night, the phone rang. This call was from a neighbor of my wife's parents in Arizona. My wife's father had just died of a massive heart attack. I had never believed much in premonitions, but somehow his phone call earlier that evening began to make sense.

Only a few weeks later my mother-in-law called again. She said that we had better sit down. My wife's grandfather, her father's father, who had been in a nursing home, was dead. Just a few weeks before, my wife and I went to tell him that his son had died. He came to the funeral for his son. Now we would travel back and do it all again for him. If there was a reason for God to put a family through two deaths so close together, we certainly couldn't figure it out.

Self

The litany of tragedy, struggle, and suffering in my own and my family's lives is really much longer than this, but I won't go into the details of it all. Briefly, the list includes myself undergoing a heart catheterization at age 12, with the very real possibility of open heart surgery to follow. In 1963 this was not as routine as it is today. Just about a week and a half before my college graduation my closest grandfather died. I was a thousand miles from home and could not spend the time away from my studies at this critical time to attend the funeral. He didn't get to see me graduate. I only got to see bare ground over a newly covered grave. Just recently my father died of bone cancer. Mercifully his illness lasted only a few months, for they were very painful ones. I share all this to show that the subject of theodicy is not merely an academic one for me, but a very personal one.

I don't intend that the recounting of these stories lead anyone to the conclusion that my life has just been filled with tragedy. It has also been filled with joy and love. I grew up with parents who loved me very much and gave me a good solid upbringing. My wife and I have been happily married for 18 years and our children have been a great blessing to us.

In and through the struggles of life we have found faith, courage and hope to go on. Our daughter is now considering what college to attend next year. Our son is involved in all the sports that he was before his disease. My wife went to college after we learned of her disease and is working in a job she dearly loves. We do more together with our families than we did before the accident and the subsequent deaths. We see what we believe to be the work of the Holy Spirit in and through all that has happened.

The Big Question

Evans and Novak, on their syndicated television show, which examines political issues, always conclude the interview with their guest by asking what they call "the big question." It is a question designed to get at the heart of the matter, put the guest on the spot, and lead into their own commentary on the issue at hand. As Christians, the big question has always been, "Why?"

If God is all good, why don't I see goodness in many of the things that have happened in my life? The answer that I have often received is that God has some greater good that I cannot see. Perhaps at some time I will know the answer, but only in retrospect. All I can do now is wait and suffer until God makes it all clear to me.

This answer has never been totally satisfying. To an extent, I can understand that God is greater than I am and sees from a perspective that I do not see. But I have a hard time seeing good in depression, diabetes, and

untreatable diseases. Where is the good in untimely death? Where is the good in thousands of innocents being slaughtered in Bosnia? If there is a perspective that makes these things good, it is so far removed from my reality that the word "good" becomes utterly meaningless to me. In the meantime, while we wait for God's explanation, if all we can do is suffer in this world and wait, God must be some kind of an unfeeling and heartless monster.

If God is all powerful, why so often do I not see that power but am left to endure what seem like hopeless and helpless situations? The answer I most often received was that God is allowing this to somehow make me a better person. If that is the case, then I wish God would find some other way to improve me without afflicting those I love.

I have a hard time understanding God's power in such a classical way. If God has the power unilaterally to eradicate disease, stop war, end hunger, and to do all other good things such as these, then if God doesn't do anything, God is as much responsible for evil as for good. Even if God were in the end just to bring some good out of all of it, it does not in my mind justify the pain of the present. If God is that powerful, then God could find another way to do the same thing.

If God is all loving and all powerful then why does evil seem so real and tormenting to me? I cannot bring myself to deny the reality of evil. The holocaust is evil. The slaughter of innocent people in Bosnia is evil. The hunger of a child is evil. Alzheimer's disease is evil. My son's diabetes is evil. My daughter's depression is evil. My wife's incurable liver disease is evil. I think I have heard every attempt to explain that these are not really evils, ranging from the thought that "God is saving you from some worse fate," to "God is building character in your spirit," to "God is testing you." They are all inadequate explanations for me.

It was this same argument that was used in Martin Luther's day to sell indulgences that really angered him. The Pope was said to have this store of merit that could be transferred to others, those alive and those suffering in purgatory. People who now suffered could go straight to the glories of heaven. If you have the money, it is yours. Luther's response was that if the Pope had such merit and that merit could do such things then he would give it out of the goodness of his heart, without paying for it. If God has all power to do these things, end evil and suffering, and God is good, then why does not God just do it?

Journey

I think that in life we are always on a journey to answer the big question, "Why?" This is not exclusive to Christians, or even to religious people. Even those who profess no belief in any God still try to answer questions such as, "Where did we come from?" "What is the purpose of life?" "What is the future of the world?"

My journey to answer such questions began in my home church. It was a small Lutheran Church, located in east central Ohio. The first recollection I have of anything spiritual connected with church life came when I went through the heart catheterization I spoke of earlier. Was I to understand that this God we worshipped had the power to do this wonderful and miraculous thing? I suppose so, otherwise why would we have prayed that God do this? I came to thank and praise God for the news that the surgery and all the risks associated with it were not to be a reality. But I had not yet dealt with the question, "Why does God not always do this?"

When I was in High School we had a pastor, fresh out of seminary who was the first minister I can ever remember who challenged the congregation

to think in new ways. He was not willing to accept something just because it was always what Lutherans have believed. He had me help him with the worship service (a novel idea for the congregation, that anyone but a minister could be in the chancel helping with worship) by reading scripture lessons. I recall one time he was to preach on a text about prophets, and challenged the congregation to think that God may indeed have prophets today. He had me help him with a dialogue sermon, in which he claimed that Simon and Garfunkel were modern day prophets, and played portions of their song *Richard Corey*. It was during this time in my life that I first felt a call to the ministry.

Life in Christ was presented to me by this pastor as a challenge to work to change the world. God was pictured more as a cheerleader to what was going on in life, rather than as a participant. God's love was the impetus for my social concerns, but I got no sense that God was a personal God that was with me in life.

Under the leadership of this pastor, I was led to get together with some young people and adult leaders from several congregations in town to begin a coffee house type ministry in the town for young people. He took us to another community where a church was successfully doing this. While our ministry never really got off the ground, it put me in touch with a segment of Christianity that I had not experienced before, Charismatics.

For the first time in my life I had heard of things such as speaking in tongues, baptism of the Holy Spirit, and gifts of the spirit. I became acquainted with one fellow who later invited me to come visit him at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. From that association I transferred to ORU for my Junior and Senior years. There I jumped headlong into the Charismatic Movement.

The people here taught me of a very personal God, a God so good and loving that only the best would happen to us and for us. But the picture of God painted for me was not the picture of the God of my reality. It was a picture of a dream world. I didn't live in a dream.

But while there I felt a renewed call to the ministry. I turned to my Lutheran roots, sought counsel from the pastor who had influenced me in high school, and went to a Lutheran seminary right after college.

Following a very traditional seminary training, being immersed in the Augsburg Confession, I began to serve right away in parish ministry. I have since served four congregations and am presently the chaplain at a retirement village. But serving as a pastor puts one right in the middle of the why questions. One is forced to examine with the parishioners as well as with oneself all kinds of questions concerning God.

The experiences have made me examine and reexamine my understanding of God. I remember a 14 year-old girl with cancer, who forced herself to learn her catechism so that she could be confirmed. She died less than a week after she was confirmed. There was a 13 year-old girl who was struck by a car while waiting for a school bus, who was pronounced dead just a day before our son was born. A man who was influential in the church as well as the community died while he was flying a small plane. It devastated a whole community. Again the list could go on. The point being, there is nowhere in the ministry that I can go and avoid such pressing questions about God.

The answer I had gotten in my early youth and reinforced in my seminary training is that of a God who is all-powerful, who can make all things well, who sometimes chooses to in this life, and when the choice is not to, will make all things well in the end. The pastor of my high school years

taught me of a God who gives us great freedom and leaves the nitty gritty work of making the world a better place up to us. My charismatic friends taught me about a very mysterious God, who gives us strange gifts, new and strange prayer languages, and power to overcome a world of demons. None of these answers seemed to match my reality.

I have only written about what I see as personal suffering in this spiritual autobiography. In the world around us there is massive suffering and evil: war between nations and within nations, violence in our streets and in our homes, and systemic evil in the church, society and institutions of our world. The current literature on the topic of theodicy demonstrates that the problem of suffering and evil is certainly much greater than the very personal struggle I have gone through. Yet I believe that every person's individual struggle with the questions of evil and suffering should be taken just as seriously as the larger issues, for they both touch us very much to the core.

And now, in the present, I still struggle with these questions. I do not have all the answers, nor do I expect that through the Doctor of Ministry program I have found all the answers. But I will continue on the journey of searching for answers to my burning why questions.

PART III

THE PROJECT

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

But Jesus . . . said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you."

Mark 5:19

Everyone has a story to tell. It is a story that chronicles events and circumstances that have brought the person to the present situation. But this story also includes a spiritual aspect, and the story also tells the story of God's involvement in the person's life. There are times in people's lives when they become more attuned to the story of their individual life and become more attuned to the presence of God's activity in their lives. Life review is a way of reviewing one's life in the hope of finding meaning in what has happened, and to find the story of God's involvement.

This project has been an attempt to help people find the presence of God in and through their times of grief. It is an attempt to use life review as a tool for helping this to happen. It is an attempt to see if life review can help both the resident as well as the chaplain identify areas of grief and begin the process of dealing with them effectively. In this chapter I will outline how the project came together, how it was planned, and how it really happened.

In The Beginning

This project began in my mind a few years ago when I attended a workshop on the subject of life review in a retirement setting. Richard Morgan, a retired Presbyterian minister, was the featured speaker. He had used life review as a volunteer chaplain in a nursing home for a number of years. He shared many stories about the healing that had taken place in the residents' lives through doing life review. This was done in a group setting, with each having a chance to be heard by the others and have their lives validated as having had meaning.

It occurred to me that there are many residents that I serve who would benefit from such a group, yet my experience at Mount Pleasant has been that groups are hard to do. And many of the issues I was familiar with in some of the residents' lives were not issues that they were likely to share in a group. I began to investigate the possibility of using life review on a one-to-one basis. I found that there were those doing this, mostly in hospital settings where group work would be nearly impossible, as few patients stay long enough to build groups. I wondered how this might translate into a long term care setting such as Mount Pleasant.

Another issue that constantly surfaces at Mount Pleasant is the issue of grief. People grieve over many things, not just death. But as a way to begin to address grief issues, we tried to begin a grief support group, focusing mainly upon issues related to the death of a spouse or other family member. But the group never got off the ground. After a very good initial meeting, very few returned. I sensed that for some the depth of sharing from others was too much to take. There were others who seemed very uncomfortable about sharing with the group. They wanted more of a lecture from me than a common sharing. As a result the group idea fizzled out.

This project came together as an attempt to find something to offer residents as a way to open up to the grief issues in their lives in a way that will be most helpful to them. It also had to be a method that I could manage. I do not have much counseling training, and most of that is in crisis counseling. It was not my desire to return to school for a counseling degree. This project looked at how effective life review, which could easily be done on an individual basis, was in getting at the grief issues in the residents' lives so that they could be addressed. If it proved to have some effectiveness it would speak to my need to help the residents get at grief issues and the residents' need to talk about them in a non-threatening way.

The Timeline

The following timeline will aid to understanding how the project unfolded. It also serves as a reference tool for digesting the information that follows. Everything took place in the year 1995.

January - The Context Associates and Project Consultants were secured.

February - A newsletter article inviting participation went out to the residents in *The Pleasant News*, with three inquiries and one who agreed to participate.

March - May - Individual contacts were made to residents inviting them to participate. Six others were found.

June - July - The health of a number of the participants failed and additional participants were secured.

August - A letter of invitation was sent to six residents to attend an information meeting in September.

September - The information meeting was held. No one attended.

October - December - The life reviews were conducted.

The Plan

The plan was that there would be six residents at Mount Pleasant who would agree to meet with me for four to six sessions, individually, to do a life review. Prior to the first session each participant would receive a survey with questions designed to reflect attitudes about God and God's presence in times of crisis and grief. This survey would be compared to a follow-up survey to determine any changes in thinking and approaches to dealing with grieving issues. Along with this would be an analysis of the participant's life story to draw out the issues of grief and loss that are currently affecting their lives.

The candidacy review committee suggested that there be an initial meeting with all the participants to outline the project. Even though they would not share stories, they would feel a bond with others going through the process. The project could then be concluded with a meeting to discuss the idea of life review, but not their individual stories.

But we all know what can sometimes happen to the best laid plans. Though these plans often seemed to go awry, I believe that the way the project came out can help to determine some meaningful results. Now I will share with you how it did work.

The Project As It Progressed

In February of 1995 a newsletter article was placed in *The Pleasant News,* a monthly newsletter distributed to residents at Mount Pleasant. (See Appendix A.) A brief introduction was given to the idea of life review and an invitation was extended to residents to contact me if they might be interested in participating in the project. I received three inquiries from this article, with one woman, Doris, particularly interested. I did not expect there to be much response from such a general notice, but I wanted to be sure that there was

not someone who would be right for the project that I would be unaware of and overlook. This was the case. Doris was a good selection.

I then approached six others, which would give me an alternative if one was not able to continue. Being in a retirement facility, that is always a distinct possibility. How little I realized the possibility. The names of five of these residents are Alice, Jackson, Elsie, Fred, and Mary, whose stories are touched upon in the first two chapters. All but Mary have now died, and Mary's health is such that she could not participate. This left me scrambling at the time I was to begin the project for participants.

In August I sent a letter to Doris and five others I found who were willing to take part inviting them to a meeting to outline the program and to answer any last minute questions that they might have. (See Appendix B.) Doris called and said that she had to work that day and could not come. But she asked me to send her any materials that I handed out. This I did. It included an outline for the day and the initial assessment survey. (See Appendix C.) I heard from no one else that they could not attend. No one came.

A couple of phone calls and conversations in the halls led me to believe that the number one reason for not coming was that they wanted to retain anonymity. Even knowing that they would not have to share anything about themselves with the group, they did not want anyone else to know that they were participating. I could see then that this would have to be a very private project. Having a group meeting, as was suggested at the candidacy review, did not work.

The next step was to set up a schedule with each of the participants to meet regularly to conduct the review. While this sounds as though it should be an easy task with everyone living right here on campus, it was not.

Between the regularly scheduled meetings, worship, and Bible study that I do and the activity involvement of the residents, we had a time of it. But we finally worked things out. As we progressed one of the participants suffered a stroke and was not able to participate until after the time of the project. (I will do this for him at another time.) After only one session with Doris, she unexpectedly collapsed at home, suffering a massive heart attack and died a few hours later. This left me with only four participants and not enough time to find others. So I continued with just the four. Their stories are told in Chapter 7.

The surveys were distributed in advance of our scheduled times, but only one of participant had it completed prior to the life review. It was then not possible to use it as an initial tool, but more as a final evaluation instrument. I would then have to surmise from the interview what the attitudes may have been on the questions, comparing that with what is expressed in the survey later.

The intention was that there be four to six sessions with each participant. This happened in only one case. With one, we spent two rather long sessions together. With another only one, but it took most of an afternoon. With another there were numerous shorter visits, as she was unable physically to take too much at one time. Though the sessions did not occur as planned, we were able to cover all that we needed to cover.

The residents came from various levels of care at Mount Pleasant. There is one resident each from independent living, apartment living, assisted living, and nursing. I have not identified which residents come from which area to further maintain their anonymity.

Context Associates and Project Consultants

For this project the Context Associates should be more properly called Context Consultants. We did not hold group meetings to plan or discuss plans, but rather I called upon the Associates individually from time to time, to "pick their brains" about their particular areas of expertise. Their helpfulness was in identifying some of the people to be invited to be a part of the project, assessing any changes noted in their behavior or outlook during the project, and to compare what the residents say to others as compared to what they say to me in the life reviews. Often times the nurses, social workers, and activities staff are told things by the residents that I never hear, simply because they work with them more closely.

I understand that there is a legitimate concern in utilizing the Context Associates in this way. It could lead to my manipulation of the project to simply serve my own needs rather than those of the residents and the context. This certainly was not my intention. Also, I did not hear from the Context Associates in any way that they harbored this feeling.

The Context Associates included a nurse, a social worker, and an activities coordinator, all employees at Mount Pleasant. The list also included two cottage residents, one who has a great deal of contact with the Center residents and another who was a social worker at another community. They were all aware that they were to be employed by me as Context Associates and were willing to function in whatever capacity that I needed them.

One of the project consultants helped me with the basics of doing life review. He has a great deal of experience in this area and will soon publish a book on the subject. He shared with me portions of his manuscript, but because of copyright concerns I was not able to quote any of it in this paper.

He shared with me a bibliography that furnished me with resources which I was unaware of. He was very encouraging to me to continue to examine life review as a tool for ministry.

Another has been involved in life review on an individual basis. She works as a nurse educator in a hospital setting. Though her work is not directly comparable to chaplaincy work in a retirement community, her inventory of questions was a great aid in doing the life reviews.

The third was a social worker in an area retirement village who helped me in doing the evaluations. Together we went over the life reviews and the evaluations and determined most of what is reported in Chapter 8.

Suggestions from the Candidacy Review

There were a number of suggestions given to me at the candidacy review, though I received no official documents following the review. One was to have a group meeting with the participants before and after the project. I have already explained about the failure of the first meeting so no follow-up meeting was scheduled.

The Candidacy Review helped me to see that one of the major experiences of evil for the people I serve is the issue of grief and loss. At first I was looking at the project as the addressing of spiritual questions, most of which begin with the word "why". This would be too broad a subject for this project. So I focused more directly upon the issues of grief and loss. While there are other spiritual issues that are raised in a retirement community, issues of grief and loss are certainly major ones.

The group also suggested that I look at ways that life review can be institutionalized in an ongoing way. It appeared to be beyond the scope of this particular project to do so at this time. That is an issue I address in the

final chapter. If in fact life review helps to address issues of grief and loss, then an ongoing program of its use is certainly in order.

CHAPTER 7

THE PARTICIPANTS

I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord,
the praiseworthy acts of the Lord,
because of all that the Lord has done for us,
and the great favor to the house of Israel
that he has shown them according to his mercy,
according to the abundance of his steadfast love.
Isaiah 63:7

In this chapter I will give an introduction to the participants in this project. In my dealings with these folks as a chaplain I have become aware of certain issues in their lives that are causing them grief. Their stories will unfold in the same way that they did for me. The first part of this chapter will give an introduction to each of them with as much information as I knew going into the life review. The second part is a synopsis of each review, showing how these grief issues surfaced and some of what was learned from them. These are not verbatims but are my recounting of those parts of the life reviews that deal with specific grief issues. The third part is a brief reflection upon the grief and loss issues raised with each of the participants.

Before the life review

Phyllis

I had met Phyllis upon her arrival to Mount Pleasant, and even shared pleasantries with her for some time, but did not know much about her until one day after Bible Study. She called me aside to ask me a question. As soon as we were out of earshot of the others she asked, "Do you believe that if someone commits suicide they will go to heaven?" This question came very much out of the blue for me, but had obviously been a question that had troubled her for some time. After asking the question, she broke down in tears.

She collected herself and told me that many years ago her daughter had committed suicide. She believed that this was a sin. She was worried about her daughter. Would God forgive her? She shared with me much of the advice that she had been given over the years by pastors, friends, family, and others to try and understand. But nothing had seemed to help the discontent that she felt. The grief was not only for the death of her daughter, but the worry that her daughter may not be in heaven. There were even some who have said that God will not forgive taking one's own life. If this is so, then her daughter's fate was sealed.

I wondered, too, if the grief wasn't even deeper than this. It would seem logical that she may feel guilty about any role she may have played in her daughter's death. She may wonder if it was something she did as a parent, or should she have seen this coming and been able to stop it. My hope was that through life review, we could open up to more of the issues of grief and deal honestly with them.

C. J.

Clarence James came to Mount Pleasant following a stroke. His wife tried to care for him at home, but it was just impossible. C. J. is a large man, not particularly obese, but very muscular and obviously athletic. There are indications of his love for sports in the pictures and mementos in his room. Physical activity, and lots of it, was a vital part of his life. The stroke has taken all of it away. He can walk, but only with assistance from the staff. He spends most of his day in a wheelchair, moving himself to those events that he wishes to be a part of, but spends a great deal of time alone in his room.

C. J. was successful in his business and very well known in the community. He still has contact with many of his colleagues, and looks forward to the day when he can get back to doing some of the things he loves. When he speaks about his past role and his future there is a sense in which he seems to understand that most of his hopes are not really possible. There has been very little that C. J. has not been able to accomplish in life. Giving up hope in a dream has not been a part of his life.

C. J. has family in the area, and several of them visit him often, especially the children and their spouses. Yet I do not ever remember seeing his wife. I learned that this is his second wife, his first wife being deceased. It is quite common to find residents who have been married only a short time to a second spouse, as the health of many is quite good after the passing of the first husband or wife. In fact, he was not married long to this wife until his stroke came. This often raises its own issues, for it shatters the hopes of both for their future, two people who do not have a long history of commitment together. It is quite possible that this is an issue for C. J. as well.

C. J. has never raised many God questions with me as we have talked, but I do know that his father was a minister. C. J. was a leader in his church

and was active up until the time that he was no longer able to go. He still has many friends at the church and many of them keep in touch. Yet he has not made a point of attending worship or Bible study at Mount Pleasant, even though he is able to do so.

I really think that there is much more going on in this man than he is willing to allow to be shared with others, or that he is even willing to admit to himself. He is in some denial of his abilities now and probably has lived with denial of other concerns in his life. I wanted to see if life review could help to bring some of these issues to the forefront where they can be acknowledged and the process of dealing with them can begin.

Grace

Of all the participants I know Grace the best. She has been at Mount Pleasant as long as I have been. She was given no more than six months to live when she first came, but it has now been over four years. Though her health has gone up and down through the years, she has a real determination to go on.

Grace is in many ways an anomaly here. While the earlier information on the background of residents at Mount Pleasant shows that they are the professional, upper income kind of folks, Grace comes from a much different background. She has had to struggle all of her life with a meager existence. While she tried very hard to do for her children what was not done for her as a child, she was not always able to do so. As she has said, they had "enough to get by," but my sense is that they never had enough to get ahead.

Grace had a miserable childhood. Her father was an alcoholic, who squandered what money he did earn on drinks. Often there was no food for the family, and many nights the children went to bed hungry. Her mother was

caught in a trap that so often vexes women. She had no where else to go and so had to put up with this behavior, even at times having to defend him. Grace married young, partly to get out of the house, and was fortunate to have married a man who was quite the opposite of her father. Yet the scars from that early childhood often surface, though she will then quickly close it off as the wounds are still too painful. She has several children, most living in the area, but their relationship is sometimes on and sometimes off. This also causes her to grieve.

Church has been an important part of her life. She was sent to church as a child and continued to go as an adult. She has asked me many questions about God, usually in the form of asking what I believe about a certain Bible passage. Often they have to do with the demands God puts upon the people, and promises in return that she seems not to have received. Yet she never has questioned the goodness or love of God, but her questions indicate that there is some questioning going on in her mind. She attended a very conservative church that does not allow for questioning, only acceptance of what is taught. This has probably been a source of great uneasiness for her. She has told me, too, that the Bible was often quoted to her as a child to justify many of her father's actions.

It was my hope that life review could help her to stop denying some of the things that she felt, things she feared were unacceptable to feel, and to be more honest with her past. This may have been too much to hope for, but for Grace, living now on borrowed time, we hoped for much.

Andy

Andy has had several tragedies in the past couple of years. These include the death of his wife and some major surgery for himself. He seems

to have come through them all right (whatever that really means) though I am not always sure that this is the case. He has tried to keep a stiff upper lip and positive attitude through it all, but that at times can be self-defeating.

Andy is a thinker. By that I mean that he ponders everything that happens, is willing to challenge ideas, and loves to hear opposing views on issues. The questions that he has raised with me about faith show me some sophistication in his examination about his belief in God. He has often commented in Bible study that he does not agree with certain things that are said in the Bible. He will stand his ground with those who take a very literal view of Biblical passages. Yet his faith remains strong and he continues to be active in his church.

I somehow suspect that things are not inside Andy as he portrays on the outside. To question many of the tried and true beliefs about God can often leave one empty inside, wondering what is left that can be believed. I have been there myself. I very seldom hear Andy speak about his wife. It could be that he is in some denial about how much her death has really affected him. Andy wants to be very self reliant. He will always smile and tell you that everything is all right. But I'm not sure that it always is.

It was my desire to see if life review could help Andy to find comfort in his times of grief with the faith he has been left with after his questioning. On another level, perhaps life review could help Andy face some of the issues in his life that he finds easier to deny.

Synopsis of life reviews

Phyllis

We were not long into the life review until I realized that there were many issues of grief and loss in Phyllis' life that were still causing her pain, though the death of her daughter may be the crowning point. Phyllis was raised in rural Kentucky. Her mother and father died while she was young and she was taken in by an aunt and uncle. Though they treated her "all right" she never felt as though she was loved. She said that she cannot remember ever being held on her aunt's lap. They took care of her physical needs, but her emotional needs seemed pretty much ignored. She said that she does not remember them ever talking about her parents. It was not until later in life that she learned much about them from other relatives. In fact she can often remember her aunt saying, "If it weren't for you. . . ," and then the statement would indicate all she could have and do if they did not have to care for Phyllis.

At one point she told me that she had often wondered as a child, "Why don't I get the love the other children do?" I pressed her on this, and the only thing that she could answer was that her aunt and uncle also had to raise some of their own grandchildren and that they resented her. But then it seemed that she tried to apologize or justify her aunts actions by saying, "That was hard to understand as a child," but she could understand it when she had a three-year-old of her own. But because of this Phyllis went out of her way to show affection to her own children.

She so wanted to get out of her home situation that at age 14 she moved to Ohio with another aunt. She lied about her age to get a job. She met a man soon after that and married him. He "didn't manage money well"

and she had to work to pay off his notes. He drank heavily, and though Phyllis says he was not abusive to either her or the children, he just "wasn't there." Though they had nothing in common, she says she still loved him He would not go to church with her, not even when the children were baptized. This hurt her deeply. He later stopped drinking, just on his own, which she called an answer to prayer. She still seems in some denial about her relationship with him, saying "he wasn't a real alcoholic" since he stopped on his own. Also his father was a cruel man, though she liked him.

Then we came to the toughest matter of all, the children. As we began this time in her life she prefaced her remarks with comments like, "I want to tell you this, but it is so hard," and, "It hurts just as much today as it did then." Her children had a terrible childhood. With their father drinking and seldom being there, along with little money, it was very hard for them all. But she did the best that she could. Her daughter seemed to be affected the most by it all. She was troubled for a long time. Then one day, when she was 33, she took her life. She left behind three children, 16, 12, and 2 1/2. I asked if she and her husband found that the tragedy brought them closer or drove them apart. She answered, "We never talked about it. It just wasn't discussed." In the most troubling moment of her life she had no support.

Faith in God has been a part of Phyllis' life early on. She went regularly to church with her aunt and uncle as a child. This was important to them. It was generally a very good experience for her. God was seen as a loving God who takes care of God's children. Yet Phyllis said later on, in asking me about one of the survey questions, that she thinks God gives suffering (in her case her mental suffering) in order to teach us lessons. This is how she is able to make some sense of all that she has been through in life. She was never quite clear, though, about just what lesson she is supposed to

have learned. Her church upbringing was very strict, and her church had many dos and don'ts, such as playing card, drinking, profanity, and the like. Included also was the belief that suicide may be an unforgivable sin. It was not stated that bluntly, but that was the gist of what she said. It is perhaps this upbringing that had led her to question the eternal fate of her daughter, a question that still brought Phyllis much sorrow.

She wanted to share this part of her life with her husband, but he refused. Even after he stopped drinking his behavior did not change. He did not discourage her from church, but he would not go with her. Church involvement continues to be a big part of her life and she finds great comfort in worship and Bible study. She is pleased that her daughter's son, who reacted in rebellion following his mother's death, is now married and actively involved in church.

In summary, at the end of our time together, she wanted me to be sure and understand that she had enjoyed many good things in life that cover up most of the bad. Then she added, "But not my daughter's death." It seems that she can rationalize, excuse, or defend the behavior of the others who have hurt her in life, but it does not work for her daughter's death. All in all, she seems to be at peace with her God in most things, though she believes she may never be at peace about her daughter.

C. J.

C. J.'s life seems just about the opposite of Phyllis' life. His life was little troubled early on, but has been greatly troubled in recent times. C. J.'s father was a minister. Church has been a part of his life all of his life. He was expected to be in church whenever the doors were opened. He attended

church related colleges in both his undergraduate and graduate work. He is an elder in his church today.

C. J. was an athlete. He had a scholarship for sports in college, playing football, basketball, and baseball. He was even offered a chance at minor league baseball, but turned it down for an academic opportunity, which seemed to have more realistic chance of providing for his future. It turned out to be a wise decision. He has always been interested in sports and later took up golf, which he mastered quite well. Being physically active has been a source of pride for him.

He married after his schooling and was happily married for over 40 years. His wife died after an extended illness. It was a great loss to him. "I lost my life's companion," was how he put it. He says that they never really argued about things and got along wonderfully well. I suspect that this is because they both lived very traditional roles and were pleased with that. He worked long, hard hours and she ran the home. He was quite successful and she felt quite fulfilled in her role as mother and wife.

C. J. has always been able to accomplish pretty much everything he sets out to do, but he could not keep his wife from dying. He had to retire before he wanted to because of his failing health. He was trying to get on with his life when he met up with a woman who had been a family friend and wife of one of his buddies. She was widowed now and lonely just as he was. They started seeing each other and began to plan a life together. They sold his house, since they would only need one, got married, and went on a honeymoon. It was on the honeymoon that he had a debilitating stroke, from which he has not fully recovered, nor most likely ever will. Rather than getting better, he has had numerous setbacks and the prospects for ever again

living elsewhere other than here are doubtful. While he knows this, he hopes against hope that it is not the case, but to no avail.

C. J. suffers from depression now, and takes the view that everything is against him. While he will not come out and blame God for all his misery, or even any part of it, he will not participate in any of the religious activities here. He says it is because so much religion was forced on him when he was young. Yet it didn't stop him from involvement in church throughout the years. He even had his new wife coming to church with him. He says also that too much of the preaching and hymns we use are about death. I sense that C. J. does blame God, or at least is angry with God, for the recent changes in his life, but cannot bring himself to verbalize it. It was not acceptable for him to question any of God's actions when he was a child, and it now still seems unacceptable for him to do so.

C. J. still talks of getting back into the business. While he knows that he cannot do all that he once did, he is certain that there are still other things that he can do. Each setback he has makes it clearer to others that this is probably not going to happen, but does not dim the hope that C. J. has. All of his life he had been able to accomplish whatever he set out to do, and he deals with the pain of the present by believing that he can still do the same. The concern of those closest to him is how far he may fall if and when he comes to the realization for himself that many of these dreams cannot be realized.

Grace

"I had a wonderful mother and a terrible father." This is how Grace summed up her childhood. She was one of ten children living in a small Kentucky village. She talked often about how she often cried herself to sleep

because of hunger. Her father worked, but most of the money went for alcohol. When there was food, he ate his fill. She says that the children didn't want to eat with him. They were fearful of their father. If there was some left they ate it. Others in the community tried to help them, but if he found out, he would exchange whatever was given for money or booze. Her father was physically abusive to both her mother and the children. In order to make ends meet, her mother took in laundry that she washed on a washboard. I asked, "How were you able to make it through all of this?" She pointed her index finger upward and said, "He was watching over me."

"I had a good husband." This describes the next chapter of her life. As she tells the story he was very good to her and their children and helped to build self-esteem in her that was non-existent in her childhood. But all was not always well. Her husband was a "sickly" man and could not really work to support the family. That was left up to Grace. She held many jobs over the years to support the family, from managing a donut shop to working as a nurse. She often worked 12 to 14 hours each day, only to return home and take care of the household duties, which included five children. Though much of the burden for providing the income and raising the family was placed upon her, she managed because of the love she received from her husband and family. She still speaks of how much she misses him.

Church was a big part of her life, even as a child. They went to church often and were taught that God will see you through whatever comes. God was not portrayed as one who causes trouble or is there to rescue you from it, but as one who gives strength and hope in the midst of trouble. She still holds to this view. She credits God with giving her the ability to endure the hardships of her life. She passed that faith on to her children, seeing to it that they attended church and Sunday School regularly. She is encouraged that

some of her children are active in church today, but disheartened that some have strayed. She will not give up encouraging them to go. One son who used to drink heavily "got saved" a couple of years ago and she was very happy for him. But he has returned to drinking and she questions whether or not he was really converted. But she will continue to pray for him.

Grace's children visit her often, though she does not always think that they visit often enough. All of her brothers and sisters are gone. Her husband died eight years ago, and was very ill the last few years. She has recently learned that one of her sons has cancer. This news was withheld from her for some time, but it finally came to the point that it could be hidden no longer. Her health continues to fail, but she is a fighter. She has been in and out of the hospital a number of times since she has come here. But she has a real drive to continue. She says that she wants to see her children all make something of their lives, some have, some are still on the way.

Andy

Andy grew up in a small Kentucky town of about six thousand people. Everyone knew everyone in town. There were no secrets. When Andy's father lost his grocery business during the depression, his father began beating his mother. Perhaps in such a small place the shame of failure was too much to take. His mother had managed to put aside a little money that his father did not know about and she had encouraged them to buy a few rental properties so that they had some income. Andy credits his mother with saving the family in those days. His father, feeling sorry for himself, soon turned to drink to ease his pain.

Church was a big part of Andy's life as a child. "We went to church whether we liked it or not." Every Wednesday evening, Sunday morning, and

Sunday evening the family was in church. It didn't matter what church. Though they belonged to the Methodist church, they might just as easily go to another, except perhaps the Catholic church. There was a strong anti-Catholic sentiment in town. In fact there were "Catholic" as well as "Protestant" grocery stores in town.

Andy's impression of the church as a child was that it was filled with many "two-faced" people, including pastors. He related one story of a pastor whose daughter was "whoring around" while the family and church was oblivious to it. He was later promoted to the position of President of a college in town. He says that all of this did not cause him to lose faith in God, but perhaps in the church.

Andy's wife was raised Roman Catholic, and he became exposed to the Jesuits about this time. He was impressed by their dedication and often wondered what was the source of this dedication and why didn't other Christians have it? They attended the Presbyterian church, the church his wife was attending when they met. With this checkered religious experience, Andy became a "searcher," searching to find out about God. Andy says that he has always been curious about things, even about religion, wondering if it is really real. He told me that he still believes in God, but is "not sure why he works as he does."

Andy's questioning of God as we spoke led him to speak of the death of his wife, his brother and his mother. All died of cancer, and very painfully so. After seeing his mother suffer and then later on his brother, he said he took his wife's death "almost too easy." He was pleased that she was relieved from her pain, though he felt as though he hadn't grieved enough for her.

It brings some pain to Andy to talk about his role as a father. He has always seen men and women in their very traditional roles, the father being

the breadwinner and the mother the nurturer. He still sees women as being able to show feeling, joy, and emotion. His assessment was that he was "less than helpful" in raising the children. He was often gone for periods of time with his job, and at the time that was all right with him. He provided for the family well. He queried, "Was I running out on responsibility?" Though he never came to any conclusion to his question, it seems so painful that his answer is probably yes.

When I asked if there was anything different he would do if he could do it all again he told me that he was not happy with about half of his life, especially as it relates to his children. But he is trying to do something about that. As he said, he is "trying to set it right." He has taken his grown children and their families on vacations around the world, to help them out and also to spend time with them.

One other thing he told me that he wants is to feel useful and needed in life, and that his life would be purposeful. When I asked him what would do this for him he said that he would like to see his children financially secure and to volunteer more to help others.

Grief and Loss Issues

Phyllis

The most obvious issue of grief and loss for Phyllis is the suicide of her daughter. This was the issue that prompted her to talk to me in the first place. It is a great source of questions in her life, particularly related to her image of God. She is struggling to find an image of God that will accept her daughter in spite of what she has done. She seeks a God that can give peace and hope in her own life.

There are other issues of grief and loss raised in the life review. One is the loss of her childhood. It was not at all like what she saw in the lives of the other children. She suffered the loss of her parents and their parental love. She received care, but not love.

Her marriage became another source of grief and loss. Her husband did not provide the kind of love and nurture that she was looking for. She looked for a marriage that would give her some of what was missing in her youth, but many of the same things were lacking in the marriage as well.

C. J.

Most of the issues of grief and loss facing C. J. seem to come in the events of recent times. C. J. still sees his childhood as good and his first marriage as a "perfect" one. While we can sometimes glamorize the past, he did not relate any issues that would lead me to believe that he is hiding anything.

In a short period of time his mother, brother and wife all died from cancer, and all very painfully so. This is the first issue that C. J. talks about as grief. He questions the goodness of a God that would allow such good people to suffer. But he doesn't seemed consumed with these issues.

What does consume him is his present illness, his inability to do what he wants, and his inability to be the husband that he desires. It is his loss of role and status that are hardest for C. J. Though he will sometimes deny that these limitations are permanent, in his heart he knows that they are. It is painful for him to hold out hope knowing that there is little hope in his getting better.

Grace

Her life has been filled with grief and loss, and through life review we have been able to address many of these issues. She still grieves the loss of any kind of normal childhood. The memories of abuse are still painful ones. Though she will not verbalize it, I sense in talking with her that there are still some questions she would have for her mother about what they all had to endure.

The issues of grief and loss continued into her adult life as she tried to undo the past by building a better future. Though she entered adult life hopeful that her children's future would be better, it was not always so. While there was no physical abuse as she had endured, she became the primary breadwinner and caretaker for the family. Her family missed out on much that she envisioned for them by her being away many hours and not having the emotional energy to give. She deals with this disappointment by denying that she is disappointed, but by concentrating on what she sees as the accomplishments.

She also grieves that her family is today not what she wants it to be. Most of her family is still in the area, but they are not close. She knows of one son very ill, and it causes her deep pain. It is impossible to know if her family is purposely not telling about his condition or if she is denying the reality.

Andy

Andy grieves primarily the loss of fatherhood. He mostly avoided it under the pretense of being a good father by being a good provider. He senses something lacking in this and is trying to make up for it. But his grief

also includes the acknowledgment that you cannot get it all back once it is gone.

Andy's issues of grief and loss also includes the loss of an all-good and all-powerful God that he was taught early on to believe in. This was not his experience and he has been on a quest to discover what God is like for him. His experience has led to a loss of innocence as it comes to his faith. He has spent and still spends much energy trying to come to a mature and believable image of God.

CHAPTER 8

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:5

This evaluation is in two parts. The first is a review of the responses of the participants to the assessment tool that was intended to be an initial assessment, but turned out to be a follow-up tool. The participants could respond either strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The participants were in general agreement on some statements and disagreed on others. Each statement is listed below, along with some comments about what the responses seem to indicate. The second part of the evaluation is an even more subjective look at the issues raised and what they mean for the participants. It also includes what I believe the issues are that the life reviews show and the work I still have as chaplain left to do with each participant.

I find that evaluation can be a very difficult thing, especially when it comes to evaluating how something has affected someone personally. As it relates to life review and its effectiveness in issues of grief and loss, attitudes

toward God, suffering, and other spiritual issues, this becomes very subjective. Since most of what has happened in life review is very private, we really only have my opinions and the words from the participants. Therefore you will find that much of what I say here is my own impression and subject to reinterpretation by others.

The Assessment Tool

1. God wants me to learn a lesson from my suffering.

The participants were for the most part unable to see any value in suffering from the standpoint that it has any learning value. Some learning may come, but that is not sufficient for it to be caused for this purpose. The one exception was Grace. We will see that often Grace was the lone dissenter. Her very conservative religious background provided the framework that she used to find some understanding of suffering in her life. This framework included the idea that God has a good purpose for all things.

2. God suffers with me when I suffer.

The participants tended to agree that God is a colleague in suffering. God is affected by what happens to us. They have not found God to be an apathetic God. Even Andy, who checked that he neither agreed or disagreed, told me that he believes in a God who is loving and forgiving, not vengeful or hateful, but "let's us work it out ourselves because that is what is best for us."

3. I've experienced some pain and sadness, but I really haven't suffered.

Andy and Phyllis did not know how to respond to this statement. Grace and C. J. agreed. C. J. began to cry as he gave me his response. He spoke about his wife, his mother, and others who had suffered great physical

pain. He also commented that seeing the way he is now there is no way to express his feelings other than as suffering.

4. I often wonder why God doesn't stop my suffering or the suffering of those I love.

There was disagreement on this question. C. J. and Andy strongly agreed. They were the two who were most able to voice the theodicy issue. Grace said, "In the Bible it says, 'All good things come from God.' God forgives, but don't do it no more." Phyllis assumed that there must be a reason, though she didn't know what it was.

5. Pain brings me closer to God.

Andy was the only one who disagreed. I'm not sure just why. It seemed to me from the life review that his pain, both physical and emotional, have led him to seek answers to many of his spiritual questions. It may be since these times raise questions about God that he does not feel close to God. The others seemed to find that their relationship to God strengthens during times of pain.

6. If we have faith, we will not truly suffer.

Andy is the only one who agreed. That may help to explain his response to statement 5. The others did not connect faith and suffering.

7. I often offer my suffering up to God.

All agreed. The consensus was that God is there to hear and receive our suffering. This was another indication that theirs was not an apathetic God. Also, C. J. cried again. He says he offers his suffering up to God in

prayer all the time. But I could detect that the next thought was that he is not sure if God does anything about it. But he did not say that.

8. I get angry at God for allowing people to go through so much pain.

The respondents were split on this one. C. J. and Andy agree. C. J. said that he hated to admit it but he does have periods of anger at God. I assume that this is the stage of grief he was in. Phyllis and Grace, probably because of their conservative religious backgrounds either could not bring themselves to be angry with God or would not. I suspect the former. Grace responded, "You can't get mad at God."

9. When I see someone in terrible pain for a long time, it sometimes makes me doubt God's love.

The same split occurred here as in statement 8. Again I think it came down to willingness or unwillingness to be angry with God.

10. God can't stop our suffering from natural causes, such as diseases, aging, or the effects of natural disasters.

The responses here were on the side of disagreeing. It seems they are in agreement that God has the power to stop them from happening. Though C. J. commented, "At least I'd like to think He does, but I doubt it." He finally neither agreed nor disagreed. Grace added, "We are not here to live forever." In other words, she is resolved to understand that something will take us.

11. God could stop any suffering but often chooses not to.

The respondents were all over the place here. Andy and Phyllis believed that God could but chose not to. C. J. wondered why God would

not stop the suffering of a loving mother if God could. Grace disagreed, but I was not sure why.

12. Suffering is a form of punishment for our sins.

The respondents seemed to be in the middle here. Several of the comments were that it is true for some sins, but not all suffering is directly related to someone's sins. Only C. J. was convinced that there is little relationship. While some of the participants could not give up on God's omnipotence, they were willing to admit that it appears that some suffering seems arbitrary and ambiguous.

13. God sometimes relieves suffering in response to prayer.

They all agreed here. Grace said, "It happened to me." C. J. says that he has seen people get relief from prayer, though he didn't mention himself. In the life reviews both Andy and Phyllis told me of God relieving their mental suffering in prayer.

14. The only appropriate prayer in times of suffering is, "Thy will be done."

Andy and Phyllis were the only participants to respond to this one, and both agreed. It is really not possible to know why the others didn't answer this one.

15. God sends specific forms of suffering to specific people for a reason.

Only Grace disagreed. This appeared again to come from her religious background. "Evil comes from the Devil." Therefore, no evil can be attributed to God. For her there is no hidden or indiscernible part of God.

For the others, this can be punishment for lifestyle. C. J. said, "If a person lived a wild life."

16. Suffering affects people randomly and without purpose.

Only Andy agreed. The others had trouble with the word randomly. This indicates that no one is in charge. It is simply a matter of chance or luck or unluck. Suffering may not have a purpose that it is good that it happens, as in statement 1, but there is some rhyme or reason to it, even if it is not known by us what that is.

17. I've become a better person because of the times I've suffered.

All agreed. In conjunction with other responses, I would interpret this answer as meaning that while God does not cause suffering to make us a better person, God can use suffering for this purpose.

18. Emotional suffering has been harder for me to bear than physical pain.

All agreed. This did not really surprise me. In the life reviews there was much more talk about emotional suffering than any kind of physical suffering. Even in the times physical pain was mentioned, the emotional trauma that went along with it seemed stronger.

19. Suffering and death are enemies of God.

Only Grace disagreed, though she could not explain why. It just did not seem to make sense to her that God would have enemies. "Even the Devil has to give in to God's will." She seems to have a very strong sense of God's omnipotence.

20. Human sinfulness is the ultimate cause of suffering in the world.

All agreed. While Andy agreed in question 16, this one shows that even he probably believes that there is some explanation for suffering, even if some of it seems to be random. This is not an evil God who causes suffering, though they all have different perspectives as to where suffering fits in. God can use it, it has some explanation, but God is not its cause.

Final Reflections

Phyllis

Phyllis is most deeply troubled by her daughter's suicide. But the life review revealed many other areas of hurt and pain, which Phyllis has tried to mask, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. As we went through the life review I sensed that she was having more trouble keeping up that mask. Just to do the life review she had to let the mask down some and let me see a part of the hurt and pain that she feels. The problem for Phyllis was that to let the mask down to share with me she also had to let the mask down for herself. This was frightening for her. When it got too painful she would quickly change the subject. She did this with the pain she felt in childhood. She would ask questions about why they did what they did, how they talked about her and made her feel unwanted and a burden, but would then quickly defend them as not knowing how really to raise children and by saying, "Well, I can understand how it was a burden to place a small child with them." Whether or not Phyllis will seek further help with this and other issues remains to be seen. Perhaps she will just stay behind the mask for safety.

My sense is that she will probably do the latter, for that is how she has learned to deal with issues of grief and loss throughout her life. The only

exception is her daughter's suicide. This one is too painful for her masking technique to be effective. At times it just has to come out.

Phyllis' health has worsened and she has been hospitalized several times. I will be anxious to see if the level of trust we built in life review can be helpful in my continued ministry with her.

C. J.

C. J. is in huge denial. Though his head says that he will never be what he once was he just cannot bring his heart to say the same thing. I believe that C. J. sees this as the end, or at least the beginning of the end. He has always been able to grit his teeth and get beyond any trouble he has had in life. This doesn't appear to be working with his present troubles, but he will not give up trying to make it work.

I sense that life review has helped C. J. to express his feeling of anger and frustration a little better than before. It may have helped to set the stage for him really to become expressive when we went through the assessment form. He broke down and cried several times, especially when it came to the questions about pain and why God allows this to happen. As painful as it was, it seemed to have some value to him because he wanted to continue with the survey. He had mentioned in the life review that while he missed his first wife, he was happy for her to be out of her misery. I can't say that this is the first time he has cried over his grief, but if he had cried before it was not enough. It is my hope that this opening up of these feelings can start the ball rolling in dealing with this and other issues in his life in a more effective way.

Grace

Grace is a hard one for me sometimes to understand. She has a very conservative church background and retreats to it whenever issues become too painful. On the one hand, it is good that her faith can help her to find comfort in times of need. On the other hand, however, it is a way for her to avoid the real issues of her life.

Grace ascribes all good things as coming from God and all evil things as coming from the Devil. But there are times when this is too simplistic and she will start to ask questions. For instance, she will wonder why her children don't come to see her very often (though they do come more often than she will admit) and will ask me about a Bible verse that says that children should take care of their parents. She does this often, not really verbalizing the question but trying to put her life experience into perspective with her religious background by relating it to some Bible passage. She is never quite sure where some of these passages are to be found, and I am convinced that some of them are not passages at all. It seems to be her way of saying that not all of it makes sense. Yet she will finally retreat to her more simple answers.

There is something in Grace's life that does not compute in my mind. There is something she is either unwilling to face or to recall. Those around her tell a different story than she does in many areas. Her children have said that they had a terrible childhood, yet Grace's picture is that it was a good time and not at all like her own. She has isolated herself from nearly all the residents by being verbally combative, yet then says that everyone around here is unfriendly. She doesn't want anyone to get too close.

Life review was not as effective with her as with the others. I think this is in part because her answers and responses were too scripted. They are

the coping mechanism she has used most of her life, especially the religious ideas. If they helped her, then fine, but I'm not sure they always do. To come out from behind them may be too painful for her. I will continue to be open to her to the extent she is willing to open up to me.

Andy

Andy has many regrets in life. He told me in the life review that he regrets half of his life. This is primarily the time when he was raising a family. He was often away for business reasons or to serve in the Air Force Reserve. He admitted that while he did this for the sake of providing for the family, it was also a way to avoid the family. He does not consider that he was a very good father. He is spending time as well as money now to try to make up for that, though he admits that it can never really be atoned for. All he can do now is to try and do better.

Andy has always struggled with spiritual questions. He observed religion as something one professes rather than lives. He has had a fascination with the way others live their faith. This began when he became associated with Catholic religious folk at college. Their dedication and service fascinated him, because he saw so much hypocrisy in religious people in his youth. He did not deny the existence of God, but was not certain whether the God that is often professed by Christians is the God he believes in. He said that he prays regularly and believes that these prayers are heard and answered. He also believes that God has the power to do something about our problems.

Yet there are many things about God that puzzle and trouble him. He was allowed from early on to question God, and he has. I would call him now a spiritual pilgrim. He studies and tries to learn as much as he can about

the practice of many of the world's religions. He has even taken trips to the Holy Lands in his quest.

I am not sure that life review set him in any new directions, but it helped to confirm much of what he was doing. In the end of the review he paused and thought long about what he would want for his children. He came to a few specifics, but I sensed that the search for an answer would be one that occupies much of his life from now on.

Self

Earlier I indicated that I was a fifth participant in life review. It is difficult to be as objective about how I have grown in this process as I have tried to be with the others. But a few words now might be in order.

The peer seminars were really my life review group. I came with many questions, the most troubling being, "How can I continue to believe in a God who at best seems indifferent to the troubles of my life?" The peer seminars gave me a comfortable way to tackle this question. As the group progressed and the trust level built, the depth at which I felt that I could share my questions grew.

My faith has grown stronger through all of this. Perhaps I was most afraid that by addressing the very difficult questions my faith would be gone. Instead, I have come to believe in a God who will not always step in and rescue me from the disasters of life, but will always love me through them. I can believe in a God who suffers with me when the pain of the freedom we all have been given causes enormous turmoil for us. I can believe in a God who does not determine the details of our lives but instead directs the course

that we are all heading. David Blumenthal uses the image of tacking a sailboat into the wind as a metaphor for life.[1] It is a metaphor that gives me comfort in life. While the winds may come from all directions and of various intensities, and the exact course the boat follows is determined as the winds blow, the general direction is the same. Through all the winds and courses of life God directs us on this journey, setting the overall direction it takes. I can have faith in this God.

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[1]Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God,* 47 - 48.

PART IV

THE USE OF LIFE REVIEW

CHAPTER 9

RESULTS AND REPLICATION

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

John 14:12

Beginning in the fall of 1995, six volunteers agreed to participate with me in a project of life review. The purpose was to find out if life review could be used effectively as a tool for pastoral caregivers, particularly those in a retirement center, to help residents address the grief and loss issues in their lives. These could be issues of an immediate nature or issues that have been hidden for many years yet still manifest themselves in other ways today. Though only four of the six were able to complete the life review, there seem to be some very clear results.

Each life review was done privately, one on one. A life review is a retelling of one's life. It is most often done chronologically, as was the case here, or by subject or theme. As a person reviews one's life, a whole spectrum of things happen, from calling into question certain values or beliefs

that no longer pertain to present reality, all the way to affirming those things in one's past that still give joy and pleasure today.

My interest was in what these life reviews revealed about issues of grief and loss, how the people handled those issues, what were the coping mechanisms used, were they effective, and could other effective ways of facing these issues be found. Also, I wanted to see if through life review we could find in the person's faith some tools for facing these issues, especially, since for many of them some of their beliefs about God have come into question in light of their present circumstances. Through reflection upon the life review and a survey given to each of the participants we found life review to be very effective in bringing out these issues, where they could be dealt with within the individual and with the caregiver. It was not my intention, nor will it ever be, that life review replace good quality counseling by a professional, if that be necessary. However there are issues that as a caregiver to older adults I often face and am asked to address, and life review can be a tool to help make this happen.

The people for this project were selected by me because I was aware of a number of issues in their lives that were typical of many of the issues faced in the lives of the residents here. There were two men and two women. One had recently experienced a dramatic change in life, where in just a short time he had faced illness, loss of role, loss of independence, and loss of a spouse. A second had experienced a loss of spouse and serious surgery. A third was haunted by memories of the past that still impacted upon her present well being. A fourth had lived a terrifying childhood and was still troubled by the memories.

I met with each person a minimum of two hours up to as many as four hours. We met a number of times. With one it was all handled in one session

that took most of an afternoon. Another took a number of sessions of 20 to 30 minutes each time. I thought it worked best to be three or four times at maybe about an hour each time, but it is possible to adapt to the particular person's situation.

I took notes at each session, so that afterwards I could write up a synopsis of each session, filling in missing details from the notes while it was still fresh in my mind. I offered the first participant the option of recording the sessions, but she seemed hesitant since she was concerned about the sessions being very private. I did not offer this option to the others, though I do read in the literature that this is often done. Sometimes the life review is then preserved as the person's gift to the following generations. Some put it all in book form. It is possible that some people may want to preserve the information in this way. It would be important that it be done in a very non-intrusive way as often the material is very sensitive and the presence of the recorder may cause someone to hold back.

The life review opened up many issues of grief and loss, as well as issues of spirituality and theodicy. Some of these issues were known to me before the life review but many, such as the abuse of alcohol and the abusive marriages, were not. The life review enabled me to become aware of many areas of concern for me in my pastoral work with the residents, such as the scars they carry with them from experiences very early in life. I became aware of dynamics in their lives that impacted the way they view their present situation. In this sense life review was helpful as a tool for the care giver.

As far as the care receiver was concerned I think life review offers some real possibilities for these individuals to again confront the issues that many times they are trying to hide. There were issues of family abuse, neglect, alcoholism, and gambling, that obviously still influenced the people

in the present. Even the memories of some of these issues still brought tears to their eyes. There is much to do here in grief work, that the caregiver can help with, but that also the care receiver must face. Whether each participant chooses to address these issues or not is up to each one. At least the issues are now out on the table. One participant talked about trying to putting some things right with his children, for which he now feels very guilty.

All of the participants were able to talk openly about what they believe about God. There were some questions raised about why God allows some things to happen, though one, because of her particularly conservative background, would finally not question God. Another was willing to ask the questions, but would always finally retreat to the belief that God must have a reason. These were the two women. The two men were much stronger in voicing their complaints or laments to God. There was much that confused them about God, and the standard answer that God knows best did not seem satisfying. I hesitate to make any conclusions about women and men here, for it was the two women who had the most conservative religious background. I think that this is more likely the reason.

This project would be easy to replicate and could be done in almost any setting, at least where the participants have the mental capacity to recall and reflect upon the past. This would make it usable in churches, senior centers, and many other places where older adults gather. It would not have to be limited to older adults, but that is the time of life when so often people do life reflections. Life review can be done by anyone who is willing to follow a few simple guidelines. Remember that life review is not a replacement for professional counseling when professional therapy is needed. However, it is a way of helping others to open up the issues that they need to confront.

The person leading the life review is there as a listener, not an advice giver. This is the individual's life review. By being a good listener a person can be helped to open up to those issues that are very difficult. It takes patience and a willingness to sit through periods of silence until the person is ready. Perseverance is also needed in coming back to those issues that may have at one time been too difficult to face. Many times the persons say that they want to come back to something later on. By being a good listener these issues can be brought up at a later time by the one leading the review.

It is important to ask questions that lead to discussion, not questions that can be answered yes or no. Only do this if there is a follow-up question that will spark discussion. For example, rather than asking, "Did you go to church as a child?" ask instead, "What do you remember about church as a child?" Try not to be too leading with the questions or you may only get your own thoughts parroted back. This is the other's life review.

It is important not to be judgmental. There may be many old wounds, and confessions and secrets may be disclosed in these interviews. It is very hard for the person to share these. In fact it is more likely that the person will be very judgmental of himself or herself. The role of the interviewer is not to pronounce absolution. There may be much, in fact, that the person has yet to do and resolve before this is of any value.

Keeping these things in mind this project could be replicated almost anywhere by almost anyone willing to take time, ask questions, and listen.

CHAPTER 10

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROJECT

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.

3 John 2

This chapter will be very personal. It is my impression of how the Doctor of Ministry program has worked for me to meet the goals I set out to accomplish. It will include also my personal reflections on the project and how I see life review being used by me in my ministry.

Goals

Personal Goals

1. I have not formally studied theology in 17 years. I wish to get back in touch with current thought.

From this standpoint I think that this goal was achieved. As a Lutheran trained in very classical Lutheran theology, the entire subject of theodicy was never raised in seminary that I recall. We were taught that the problem of evil, if there was a problem at all, would be answered in the eschaton. At that

time all things would be made right and God's kingdom will reign. Perhaps because Luther was an Augustinian monk his training would not allow him to see a problem of evil. The closest thing that I recall to a problem was what Luther called the hidden and revealed God, but the resolution was still that we should appeal to the revealed God when we seemed to be facing the hidden God, that this hidden God may not be a threat to us.

The peer seminars helped me to voice concerns I had about God, especially about what I saw as either the unwillingness or the inability of God to do anything about the evils that I face in life. One leads to an apathetic God and the other to a pathetic God. Neither God seemed a God I would want to believe in.

While the study has not answered all of my questions and struggles, the material in chapters 3 - 5 is to me at least a beginning along the path of understanding the God of the cross, who on the one had draws me and on the other repulses me. I am still on the journey, but see now that I can still maintain faith at the same time that I question. I am indebted to the peer seminars for this awareness.

2. I sometimes have doubts about my pastoral capabilities and am looking for a structured program to help with pastoral self-esteem, as well as personal.

Again, the peer seminars have been very helpful in my gaining confidence in what I do. I have been able to come to an understanding of God that enables me to minister to people in such situations as I encounter them.

Like most pastors, I like to think that my ministry is being effective in bringing good news to people, yet so often it is unclear whether or not this is

happening. The life reviews have been a good experience in that there is often immediate feedback from others as we encounter and deal with issues.

3. While we are told that we should not be in the program if all we want is the name Doctor, I would be remiss if I did not say that there is something I like about the challenge of working toward the degree.

It was not long until I soon learned that I was out of touch with much of what was going on in theology today. I had never heard the term womanist and did not know how it differed from feminist. Theodicy was not a subject that I was familiar with as a theological discipline, though such thought was certainly a part of my own spiritual struggle. I had a lot to catch up on and a lot to learn.

I could never say that now I know all that I need to know about the subject matter of our peer seminars, but I understand much better than before. It has been exciting and intellectually stimulating to approach this subject. It has been spiritually enriching as well, for all my discussion of theodicy in my personal life review comes out of my own struggles within myself, my family, and the people I serve. It has not only been an academic exercise for me but an exercise in faith as well.

4. My litany of family crises has troubled me deeply and I need a way to sort it all out.

The litany of crises in my spiritual autobiography in fact grew as the program continued. It was not until after the first intensive that my daughter was hospitalized and not until after the third intensive that my father died. I suppose my son breaking both wrists on separate occasions is simply to be expected. Since 1989, every year there has been a major crisis in our family. It is easy to wonder each year what will be coming next.

Professional Goals

1. I do not have specific training, other than one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education to serve as a chaplain. I see the D. Min. program as a way of helping me to evaluate and sharpen my skills as a chaplain.

Serving as a chaplain is certainly much different than serving as a parish pastor. There is little administrative work to do in comparison with a congregation. It has allowed me concentrate upon what I have always thought of as being my strongest skills in ministry, particularly relationship skills. Yet I found that as I did this full time there was no place to retreat in times when I judged my ministry to be ineffective and my abilities to be lacking. I was hoping to help myself feel good about what I do here and confident in my skills.

The work of the program has for one thing enabled me to be less hard upon myself. My personal faith struggles have been a source of guilt for me, believing that I should have answers to all my questions. While I cannot say that that has happened I have learned that I am on a journey to finding resolution, but that I have not arrived. The same thing can be said for what I have learned from the residents that I serve. Many of them are on the same journey with me, and much of my ministry here is to be a fellow traveler. All I can offer is a very subjective word here, but I do feel better and more confident about the work I do here as chaplain.

2. I want to have something specific to offer residents I serve as a way of helping them deal with aging issues. I see my project as being this kind of tool.

It has already happened that I have offered to do life review with some other residents. It is good to know that I can offer something very specific to residents that can be of real assistance. I understand that life review will not

be for all residents and will not offer that same benefit to all, but it certainly will not be harmful and may bring some help.

I have found, too, that by doing life review I have become a more attentive listener. Even when not doing any formal life review I am asking residents many of the same questions that I do in life review.

3. I think that older adults grapple with theodicy, whether they call it this or not. I want a way to grant them permission to ask their questions and seek answers.

The responses that I received to many of the life review questions show that the same questions of theodicy are questions that older adults ask. I don't suppose that it should surprise me. Questions about why things happen as they do, what is the source and nature of evil, and is there any value or purpose to suffering seem to be universal questions. In fact, as some researchers have pointed out it is one of the major tasks of older adults to ask these questions and seek to find answers.

Phyllis was asking if there was any purpose in her daughter's suicide. Did God have a reason, and if so, then what was it? C. J. is questioning the goodness of a God who would permit the suffering his wife and other family members had to endure through illness. Andy has trouble finding God's presence in many things that he has seen happen. Grace wonders why God does not just either take away her pain or let her go in peace. If I did not know better I would think that they were all in my peer seminar, for these sound very much like the questions we discussed.

Personal Reflections and Future Use

Overall, as a project in ministry, this project went well. The individual life review proved to be a non-threatening way to open up to very threatening

issues. While this project was limited to grief and loss issues in a retirement setting, it would not appear that there would be any limit as to a setting for life review. The project has also strengthened the bonds between chaplain and resident for those who participated in the project. Having shared what they did with me in the life reviews we do not now have to stand upon pretense.

I feel very good about the project, now that it is over. There were many rough spots to get through and several times when it seemed like it was not going to come together. I wish that I could have been able to include several more people in the life reviews, however the circumstances just did not allow it. But for myself and those who participated I think that much good was done.

I will use life review as an ongoing tool to offer to residents in need. I know that it will not be a cure all and certainly will not be appropriate for everyone. But for some it can be useful and a real opportunity for ministry. In fact, in an informal way I find that I am asking many of the life review questions in my everyday contact with the residents.

I am hoping to do some of the things I read of in other settings, like a group life review. I know that the group meeting I tried in this project did not work, but if the group were able to be ongoing and not limited by the constraints of a project it might be different. It takes time for a group of this kind to develop and for trust to build to a level where such sharing can take place. I would also like to offer life review in a more general sense to those who may want to record their stories and reflections of their lives for others. I am sure that this can be a very valuable thing. In the mean time I will continue to offer to the residents the possibility of an individual life review like those done in this project.

APPENDIX A

NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

Chaplain Chat

Bearing Each Other's Burdens

"Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."
Galatians 6:2

I have a request to make to you. I am looking for some of you to help me.

I am in a Doctor of Ministry program at United Theological Seminary in Dayton. As a part of this program I need to do a project in ministry related to my ministry here with all of you. I am looking for five or six of you who will be willing to work with me in this project.

It is a concern of mine that there are many events that happen in the lives of the residents here, other than just the natural course of aging and failing health that often accompanies age. There are many tragic things that happen to us that are not expected. These things affect us deeply and often cause us to call upon our faith resources as never before. They also call into question many of the assumptions we have always held about fairness and goodness in life.

I am looking for some of you who would be willing to share with me your stories of these tragic events and the more natural stages of aging and how you have handled, or not handled them. I am thinking of things such as the

death of an adult child, a spouse being destroyed in mind by Alzheimer's disease, issues from the past that you thought were gone but now afflict you again, as well as the loss of a spouse, loss of independence, and deteriorating health.

I am hoping to develop a program whereby I as chaplain and all of us together as fellow Christians and sufferers of life's tragedies can help one another to keep the faith in facing our suffering. If you would be willing to help or want to know more about this, let me know.

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

October 26, 1995

Dear «First Name»,

I have a request of you. I may have already made this request before. If so, I am just confirming it.

I am in a Doctor of Ministry program at United Theological Seminary in Dayton. As a part of this program I need to do a project in ministry related to my ministry here with all of you. I am looking for five or six of you who will be willing to work with me in this project.

It is a concern of mine that there are many events that happen in the lives of the residents here, other than just the natural course of aging and failing health that often accompanies age. There are many tragic things that happen to us that are not expected. These things affect us deeply and often cause us to call upon our faith resources as never before. They also call into question many of the assumptions we have always held about fairness and goodness in life.

I am looking for some of you who would be willing to share with me your stories of these tragic events and the more natural stages of aging and how you have handled, or not handled them. I am thinking of things such as the death of an adult child, a spouse being destroyed in mind by Alzheimer's disease, issues from the past that you thought were gone but now afflict you

again, as well as the loss of a spouse, loss of independence, and deteriorating health.

I am hoping to develop a program whereby I as chaplain and all of us together as fellow Christians and sufferers of life's tragedies can help one another to keep the faith in facing our suffering. I'll be in touch with you about this matter soon.

God bless you,

Chaplain Havey

APPENDIX C

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

September 8, 1995

Name_____

(Please answer each question honestly. The answers will be held in strict confidence)

Place a check by the answer that comes the closest to your feelings.

1. God wants me to learn a lesson from my suffering.
   _____ strongly agree
   _____ agree
   _____ neither agree nor disagree
   _____ disagree
   _____ strongly disagree

2. God suffers with me when I suffer.
   _____ strongly agree
   _____ agree
   _____ neither agree nor disagree
   _____ disagree
   _____ strongly disagree
   _____ neither agree nor disagree

3. I've experienced some pain and sadness, but I really haven't suffered.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

4. I often wonder why God doesn't stop my suffering or the suffering of those I love.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

5. Pain brings me closer to God.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

6. If we have faith, we will not truly suffer.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

7. I often offer my suffering up to God.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

8. I get angry at God for allowing people to go through so much pain.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

9. When I see someone in terrible pain for a long time, it sometimes makes me doubt God's love.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

10. God can't stop our suffering from natural causes, such as diseases, aging, or the effects of natural disasters.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

11. God could stop any suffering but often chooses not to.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

12. Suffering is a form of punishment for our sins.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

13. God sometimes relieves suffering in response to prayer.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

14. The only appropriate prayer in times of suffering is, "Thy will be done."
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

15. God sends specific forms of suffering to specific people for a reason.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

16. Suffering affects people randomly and without purpose.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

17. I've become a better person because of the times I've suffered.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

18. Emotional suffering has been harder for me to bear than physical pain.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

19. Suffering and death are enemies of God.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

20. Human sinfulness is the ultimate cause of suffering in the world.
_____ strongly agree
_____ agree
_____ neither agree nor disagree
_____ disagree
_____ strongly disagree

AGENDA

Introduction to Life Review Project

September 8, 1995

2:00 p.m.

****

Welcome & Introduction

Opening Prayer

An overview of this project

- My interest - helping people sort through matters of faith during crisis times.
- How the project developed
- How it will be reported - anonymity insured

An overview of life review

- A brief history
- What to expect
- Option to record for posterity
- A sampling of life review questions

Initial assessment

- Used as one tool to assess the effectiveness of life review and spiritual questions
- Will be followed at the end by another assessment

Will have follow-up meeting to give input into the usefulness of life review

Closing Prayer

APPENDIX D

LIFE REVIEW QUESTIONS

The following list of questions was developed by Dr. Barbara Haight for use in Life Review. They come from both her experience of Life Review as well as from other written sources. Following this list I have included a list of additional questions that I found to be helpful in approaching issues of grief and loss. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions, nor is it to imply that every question must be used in every life review.

Haight's Life Review and Experiencing Form

Childhood:

1. What is the very first thing you can remember in your life? Go back as far as you possibly can.
2. What other things can you remember when you were very young?
3. What was life like for you as a child?
4. What were your parents like? What were their weaknesses, strengths?
5. Did you have any brothers and sisters? Tell me what each was like.
6. Did someone close to you die when you were growing up?
7. Did someone important to you go away?
8. Do you ever remember being very sick?
9. Do you remember having an accident?
10. Do you remember being in a very dangerous situation?

11. Was there anything that was important to you that was lost or destroyed?
12. Was church a large part of your life?
13. Did you enjoy being a boy/girl?

Adolescence:

1. When you think about yourself and your life as a teenager, what is the first thing you can remember about that time?
2. What other things stand out in your memory about being a teenager?
3. Who were the important people for you? Tell me about them. Parents, brothers, sisters, friends, teachers, those who were especially close to you, those you admired, those you wanted to be like.
4. Did you attend church and youth groups?
5. Did you go to school? What was the meaning for you?
6. Did you work during these years?
7. Tell me of any hardships you experienced at this time.
8. Do you remember feeling that there wasn't enough food or necessities of life as a child or adolescent?
9. Do you remember feeling left alone, abandoned, not having enough love or care as a child or adolescent?
10. What were the pleasant things about your adolescence?
11. What was the most unpleasant thing about your adolescence?
12. All things considered, would you say you were happy or unhappy as a teenager?
13. Do you remember your first attraction to another person?
14. How do you feel about sexual activities and your own sexual identity?

Family and Home:

1. How did your parents get along?
2. How did other people in your family get along?
3. What was the atmosphere in your home?
4. Were you punished as a child? For what? Who did the punishing? Who was "boss"?
5. When you wanted something from your parents, how did you go about getting it?
6. What kind of person did your parents like most? The least?
7. Who were you closest to in your family?
8. Who in your family were you most like? In what way?

Adulthood:

1. What place did religion play in your life?
2. Now I'd like to talk to you about your life as an adult, starting when you were in your twenties up to today. Tell me of the most important events that happened in your adulthood.
3. What was life like for you in your twenties and thirties?
4. What kind of person were you?
5. Tell me about your work. Did you enjoy your work? Did you earn an adequate living? Did you work hard during those years? Were you appreciated?
6. Did you form significant relationships with other people?
7. Did you marry?
   (yes) What kind of person was your spouse?
   (no) Why not?
8. Do you think marriages get better or worse over time? Were you married more than once?
9. On the whole, would you say you had a happy or unhappy marriage?
10. Was sexual intimacy important to you?
11. What were some of the main difficulties you encountered during your adult years?
    a. Did someone close to you die? Go away?
    b. Were you ever sick? Have an accident?
    c. Did you move often? Change jobs?
    d. Did you ever feel alone? Abandoned?
    e. Did you ever feel need?

Summary:

1. On the whole, what kind of life do you think you've had?
2. If everything were to be the same would you like to live your life over again?
3. If you were going to live your life over again, what would you change? Leave unchanged?
4. We've been talking about your life for some time now. Let's discuss your overall feelings and ideas about your life. What would you say the main satisfactions in your life have been? Try for three. Why were they satisfying?
5. Everyone has had disappointments. What have been the main disappointments in your life?

6. What was the hardest thing you had to face in your life? Please describe it.
7. What was the happiest period of your life? What about it made it the happiest period? Why is your life less happy now?
8. What was the unhappiest period of your life? Why is your life more happy now?
9. What was the proudest moment of your life?
10. If you could stay the same age all your life, what age would you choose? Why?
11. How do you think you have made out in life? Better or worse than what you hoped for?
12. Let's talk a little about you as you are now. What are the best things about the age you are now?
13. What are the worst things about being the age you are now?
14. What are the most important things to you in your life now?
15. What do you hope will happen to you as you grow older?
16. What do you fear will happen to you as you grow older?
17. Have you enjoyed participating in this review of your life?

Additional Questions

1. What is your first memory of church? Was it positive or negative? Why?
2. How was God described to you? How did that description make you feel?
3. Was religion and/or church an important part of your upbringing?
4. Who was most influential in teaching you about God?
5. Describe a typical worship service as you remember it as a child.
6. Did you ever stray away from God? If so, why? If not, why not?
7. When you get to heaven what is the first question you want to ask God?
8. Is there anything about God that confuses or puzzles you?
9. What do you think about God in your life today?

APPENDIX E

MAP OF THE CAMPUS

Mount Pleasant
retirement village
A Unit of
OHIO PRESBYTERIAN
RETIREMENT SERVICES
A Bus Garage
B Maintenance & Storage
C Campus Park
25A Elder Day Care / Home Health (PALS) / Exercise Room
25B Wood Shop
27A Campus Relations / Volunteers
27B Information Center
28D Activities Building
37A Guest Cottage
37B Guest Cottage
225 Health Center
Library
Offices
Dining Room
Beauty/Barber Shop
Physical Therapy
Laundry/Cleaning
Crafts
First Natl. Bank
Memory Garden
Activities Room
Chapel
Special Care Unit
Existing Campus
Current Development
Future Development
North
Scale
Future Drive
Proposed Sanctuary Drive
Westford Way
State Route 63
Britton Lane
Health Center
225
Parking Lot
Indiana Avenue
Miami Drive
Maumee Drive
Campus Park
Nature Trail
Nature Trail
Temporary Trailer Construction Complex
Parking Lot
Sanctuary Drive
Walkway
Circle
Circle
Avenue
Avenue

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As a Jewish theologian, writing post-holocaust, Blumenthal faces head on the question of a loving God in view of the horrors. Blumenthal determines that God is very much responsible for what has happened, and God must be challenged for this abusive behavior.

Farley, Wendy. *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990.

Farley seeks to replace sin with suffering as the focus of the problem of evil. Also, then, compassion replaces punishment as God's response to evil. Tragic structure replaces the Fall as a way of understanding the suffering of our world.

Frethheim, Terrence E. *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective.* Overtures in Biblical Theology Series. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

A good treatment of an often neglected theme in the Old Testament, that God suffers. Especially through the call of the prophets God is embodied, foretelling the embodiment of God in Christ.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *God, Medicine, and Suffering.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990.

Hauerwas argues that the question of Theodicy is only a question for academics and not for those who suffer. For them suffering is not a problem to be explained but a challenge requiring a response.

Inbody, Tyron. *Take the Even, Take the Odd.* Unpublished manuscript.

A good book in presenting classical theism and its traditional response to the theodicy question. Inbody argues for a theodicy from a process perspective, but analyzes other positions, affirming their strengths as well as showing their weaknesses.

Lull, David J. and William A. Beardslee. *Biblical Preaching on the Death of Jesus.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989.

Lull and Beardslee argue that the preaching of the death of Jesus is central to Christian preaching, but not as a divine plan of God for salvation, but as relational power to transform. The authors are both Process Theologians, and the book gives good insight as to how this plays out in exegesis as well as in preaching.

Mitchell, Kenneth R. and Herbert Anderson. *All Our Losses, All Our Griefs: Resources for Pastoral Care.* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.

For Mitchell and Anderson grief and loss are the prevailing problems of life. It is a lifelong issue that begins at birth.

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Moltmann seeks to keep the Cross at the center of Christian theology, without it being the abusive symbol it has often become. It is an attempt to answer many of the current questions concerning the power of God for a Trinitarian view.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

In this novel Morrison paints a riveting portrait of the complex nature of sin and evil. The past becomes very present and forgiveness is needed as life becomes the choosing of the lesser of two evils

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Using the ancient Korean concept of Han, Park argues that the suffering wronged must be included in any Christian concept of justice, forgiveness and justification. Park challenges us to see how Christianity has traditionally been a religion of the elite, with doctrines that ease the guilt of those who wrong the powerless.

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In a very poorly written style, which is painful to sort through, Sand argues that Feminist as well as most other current theologies do not take evil as seriously as it should and still yearns for paradise.

Smith, Christine M. *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.

Calling upon her experience in Guatemala with the poor, she challenges us to consider how our preaching often support classism, ageism, sexism, racism, and other "isms."

Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt. *The Fall To Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology.* New York: Continuum, 1994.

Suchocki argues that the sin of humanity is not against God directly but against the creation. She calls upon Christians to become involved to reverse our rebellion, and that we must find it in us to forgive, which is to will the well-being of others.

Townes, Emilie M., Editor. *A Troubling in my Soul.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993.

This book of essays by a number of Womanist writers is helpful in understanding the experience of Black women today and how that experience has shaped Womanist theological reflection.

Woodruff, Paul and Harry A. Wilmer, Editors. *Facing Evil: Light at the Core of Darkness.* Lasalle: Open Court, 1988.

A variety of authors from all walks of life confront the problem of evil in the world. Most of the contributors believe that some transformation of evil is possible and that we can make the world a better place.

Theology and Christology

Berkey, Robert F. and Sarah A. Edwards, Editors. *Christology in Dialogue.* Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993.

A good resource for understanding a number of christological views. Views represented include process, trinitarian, and liberation theologies.

Boff, Leonardo. *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987.

A Christological work from a liberation theology. He sees the primary work of Christ to be found in his life and association with the outcast, rather than the death on the cross.

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Braaten, Carl E. and Robert W. Jenson. *Either/Or: The Gospel or Neopaganism.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.

Cobb, John B., Jr. and David Ray Griffin. *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition.* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976.

A good overview of Process Theology. While it did not convince me to be a Process Theologian I have a better understanding of process philosophy.

Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed.* New York: Bantam, 1961.

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Moltmann, Jürgen. *Jesus Christ for Today's World.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

Norris, Richard A., Jr. *The Christological Controversy.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980.

A good book for understanding the problems and debate of Christology in Church history. I found it to be challenging, in that I had to constantly reevaluate my own Christology.

Simundson, Daniel J. *Where is God in My Suffering?: Biblical Responses to Seven Searching Questions.* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983.

A book designed primarily for lay study, answering seven very difficult questions, all related to the question of theodicy. His answers are primarily found in traditional theistic terms, yet with compassion for those for whom these answers do not seem satisfying.

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Becker, Arthur H. *Ministry with Older Persons: A Guide for Clergy and Congregations.* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986.

This book is designed to help congregations come to grips with the needs of older adults in their congregations, and to develop intentional ministry with them. It provides an excellent overview of aging issues, physical, mental, and spiritual.

Butler, Robert N., Myrna Lewis, and Trey Sunderland, *Aging and Mental Health: Positive Psychosocial and Biomedical Approaches.* New York: Macmillan, 1991.

Robert Butler was one of the first to argue that reminiscence among the elderly is a necessary an therapeutic exercise.

Davis, Robert and Betty Davis. *My Journey into Alzheimer's Disease: Helpful Insights for Family and Friends.* Wheaton: Tyndale, 1989.

Written primarily by a minister in early stages of Alzheimer's disease, and then finished by his wife, we get a rare glimpse into the inner thoughts and feelings, as well as spiritual struggles of a person with this disease.

Fitchett, George. *Assessing Spiritual Needs: A Guide for Caregivers.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993.

In health care settings, physical assessments are the norm. In this book, a hospital chaplain outlines many of the informal ways we sometimes assess people spiritually and then offers a formal way of doing this.

Harris, J. Gordon. *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

While aging issues are not often dealt with directly in the Bible, there are some themes that come through. This book characterizes these, though it is sometimes a chore to plod through it.

Lee-Hostetler, Jeri. *Seasons of Change: Meeting the Challenge of a Nursing Home*. Elgin: Brethren Press, 1988.

A weaving of fact and fiction regarding life in a nursing home, based upon experiences of the author who place her mother and step-father in a nursing home. It is a telling tale of some of the inhumanities that can take place.

Maves, Paul B. *Faith for the Older Years: Making the Most of Life's Second Half*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986.

Aging issues are dealt with here from a spiritual point of view, with the understanding the second half of life can be fruitful living. Older Adults are challenged to seek learning, creativity, and spiritual growth in these years.

Morgan, Richard L. *No Wrinkles on the Soul: A Book of Readings for Older Adults*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1990.

A devotional booklet written by a retired Presbyterian minister. It gives good insight into personal issues of aging by those who are relatively healthy and find themselves with a great deal of time on their hands.

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This is the latest in a series of devotional books by Richard Morgan. This book, designed to bring comfort to those in hospital and nursing centers gets to the heart of many of the spiritual issues facing older adults.

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A helpful book in understanding that aging is a spiritual as well as a physical endeavor. The authors share some moving and inspirational thoughts on living life to the fullest, even in the later years.

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Smith, Harold Ivan, *On Grieving the Death of a Father.* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994.

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